



ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE SERIES: Today's great interest in the adventures of Tarzan and some of the many other exciting characters created by the master storyteller, Edgar Rice Burroughs, has brought a demand for new, fresh Tarzan stories. With this book, Gold Star Books begins to fill that demand. Gold Star Books asked a talented, young California writer,

Barton Werper, to create new Tarzan adventures, based on some of the original Tarzan characters, "Tarzan and the Snake People" is the first of this series by Mr. Werper whose previous work includes several television scripts and magazine short stories.

TARZAN
AND THE
SNAKE PEOPLE

Third in The New Tarzan Series

By Barton Werper



A GOLD STAR BOOK

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CHAPTER I

The Missing Runner

Jane Clayton, Lady Greystoke, stood on the steps of veranda watching one of her husband's faithful Waizri warriors saddle her horse and lead it up the path from the corral. Her husband, John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, known far and wide to his African foes as Tarzan of the Apes, had sent a runner to his vast estate with a message which had cheered his wife's heart. Tarzan was returning. He would be home within a matter of hours. Knowing how anxious and worried his lovely wife was whenever he spent more than a day or two in his beloved jungle, Tarzan had dispatched the runner at dawn that morning, to ease Jane's fears and trepidations by an hour or so. Such was the love between the jungle lord and cultured lady. Tarzan himself could have made the run in far less time than the native, but Tarzan had in care five children of the beleaguered Mogambi tribe – children he had rescued from their burning village. And Tarzan would trust no man but himself to guard these children from the dangers of the jungle. His message contained his reassurance to Jane that all was well with him; a request to have Basuli's wife make ready room and food for his young charges; and asked that Jane ride out to meet him – as always of course in the company of his Waziri chieftain.

As the tired runner gave the native Jane had selected to carry her reply to Tarzan instructions as to how to reach him, she was equally busy. First she'd retired to the privacy of her boudoir and given way to the tears that always came when she learned once again that Tarzan was safe. It had taken Jane many months of marriage to the strange but wonderful man to learn to control her emotions before others. That she could do so was a source of great satisfaction to her husband. She was, he often

thought, the perfect mate. Secondly, Jane had washed away the signs of her tears with cold water, then gone into their large library to write her reply. As Tarzan had done, so did Jane first reassure him that all was well with her; advise him that Basuli's wife was taking the necessary steps to welcome the Mogambi children; then telling him she would leave the bungalow at high noon, riding out with Basuli to the great thorn boma on the western border of their holdings. There, Lady Greystoke added, she would await Tarzan's return. She signed the letter with all of her love; folded it and sealed it in a thick manila envelope. Then Jane walked back out onto the veranda, down its wide, gracefully curved; steps and across the path to the shadow of a huge- bush, in which Sat the fresh and the tired runners.

"Here you are, Kamjei, she smiled graciously as she handed the lithe native the manila envelope. "This is my message for Tarzan, my husband. Carry it swiftly and safely to him." She turned to the other runner. "Has he much time before he must leave?"

The tired man shook his head briefly, at which gesture Kamjei stood erect from his crouching position, tucked the envelope snugly beneath the leather cord which supported his loincloth, and with a gesture of salute, moved swiftly out of the compound. Jane watched until he was out of sight, then turned and went back to the bungalow.

Kamjei entered the greater jungle late that morning, moving as silently as the shadows surrounding him. Despite the heavy overgrowth of verdant vegetation, the tall runner moved swiftly and with the surety of knowledge. The sun dappled an occasional clearing which Kamjei always swerved to avoid, preferring instead to remain as though part of the deep brown and green coloration about him. Though he moved through a thick verdure and across a carpet made from many broken branches and twigs, he went so softly as to give no sound to human ears, and the minutest of sounds to the ever-listening ears of the jungle beasts.

Tarzan had trained his runner well.

Kamjei was aware of the many jungle noises behind and before him. They gave him a sense of safety and well-being. The trained ear can listen to those sounds and hear that all is right although the same sounds— the chattering of the monkeys, the screams of the big cats, the ever-present hum of the multitude of insects —might prove discomforting to a stranger.

Suddenly Kamjei stopped in his tracks, turned his ears and his black eyes back in the direction he had just passed. For an instant he hesitated, listening and then as though moved by an inner fear or urgency moved forward at a faster pace than he had been traveling. The jungle about him had become quiet, and to a man of Kamjei's nature that quiet was a warning. He did not greatly increase his speed, but his long swinging walk gave forth more sound than the easier pace had done. As he moved forward, the silence became more deafening to him, and he loosened his long, sharpened steel knife in preparation.

As he reached a sharp turn in the barely perceptible path, he stopped suddenly in dismay. Before him lay a clear still pool, blue and unexpectedly bright in the equally unexpected clearing there in the midst of the jungle. Although he welcomed the sight of the water, he regretted the loss of the security of the many great trees. There were but three or four trees of any size beside the blue pool, and even the shrubs any bushes which dotted the pathway to it were not much protection. Then Kamjei thought to himself, perhaps I am wrong to be distracted. At least in a clearing such as this, no danger can approach undetected. I shall rest here a short while. I am ahead of the time the other runner gave me. Perhaps, as I wait, whatever it is that has quieted the beasts will move in another direction, Then shall be able to continue without danger. As he thought Kamjei was moving past the small shrubs across the clearing and to the side of the pool. Kneeling, he took a long draught of the cold water, feeling the welcome relief flood past his throat and into his empty stomach. Kamjei leaned back against the trunk of the leafy tree

and stared down into the water determined to fight back the fear which was beginning to crowd his mind.

When he first saw the reflection of the strange and red-rimmed eyes staring back at him from the pool Kamjei's reaction was one of incredulous disbelief. Then, as he tried to turn to look up into the branches above him a feeling of lassitude, almost of languor overtook the handsome native. He found himself unable to move, unable to turn his sinewy body. As he stared in strange horror the eyes in the pool seemed to grow larger and closer. Suddenly they became part of a face, then as Kamjei struggled to scream in horror as the reflection took full focus, he felt the heavy weight hit him cutting his breath from his lungs, surrounding him and defeating him.

Kamjei passed out before he fully saw his foe.

Lady Greystoke and Basuli were almost twenty minutes late leaving the compound to ride out across the estate toward the great thorn boma. Their delay had been caused in part by the insistence of Basuli's number one wife that they carry with them some food prepared especially for the children Tarzan was bringing back. While slightly irritated by the enormously fat old woman (the wife Basuli had inherited), Jane was also amused. Both she and Tarzan had long realized that although Basuli might be the chief, and speak disparagingly of the oldest and fattest of his many wives, it was still the number one wife who ran the Waziri compound. Usually Lord and Lady Greystoke gave in to her whims just as Basuli and the warriors did. On rare occasions, Tarzan was forced to put his foot down, and for days thereafter the entire Waziri tribe was treated with a sulky indifference by the old woman. So, this day, Jane hid her irritation and waited for the food. They would, she told herself, simply ride a little faster than planned, to make up the lost time.

Basuli, the proud, erect and handsome Waziri chief, knew his master's wife was upset. He knew it was his place to tell his own wife they couldn't wait. But as strong and as brave as Basuli was, he waited. He did not, during those twenty minutes, look at Jane.

Finally the food was packed securely across Basuli's horse, and the two of them mounted their thoroughbreds and galloped swiftly across the compound. Without a word, both realized they must keep their mounts close to a gallop throughout the ride ahead in order to reach the boma by high noon. Neither had visioned the possibility of any further delay, and when Basuli's mount stumbled and threw him heavily to the ground both knew anger as well as dismay. Jane's first reaction was dismay and fear that the Waziri warrior had been injured. Basuli's first reaction was anger, at his horse for stumbling, and at himself for losing his seat. Then dismay at the realization that this last delay would truly make them late for the tryst with Tarzan. It took the Waziri a few minutes to regain his composure, and it took both Lady Greystoke and the warrior another ten minutes to coax the guilty horse back to their side. During that time, Jane made a half-hearted suggestion that she continue the trip alone. Both she and Basuli knew that Tarzan would be angered if she did so. The unwritten law on the Greystoke holdings was that Lady Greystoke never ventured out of the compound alone. Although Tarzan had taught his mate the lore of the jungle, although they frequently made swinging forays into the wilds of the jungle itself, although Jane had become adept in the trees and trailways of the jungle, Tarzan was adamant on this one point. She should not be alone. When she became uneasy beneath this constant supervision, Jane would try to argue herself out of the mood, remembering back to the horrors of being kidnapped by a tribe of renegade warriors. So, her suggestion was half-hearted on her side, ignored by Basuli.

When they finally reached the great thorn boma it was well after high noon. Tarzan and his group were not there.

"Odd, Basuli. Perhaps he met with some delay in the jungle. Had he arrived earlier, certainly he would have waited for us. My message told him we'd be here. If he hadn't waited, we would have met them during our ride. What, I wonder, shall we do now?"

"It is as you say, mistress. Tarzan must have met with a delay in the jungle. We must wait for him. He will surely be here soon."

"Yes Basuli," the lovely woman sighed, "we will wait. He will surely be here soon."

It had not occurred to either of them that Tarzan might not have received the message. Kamjei, after all, was the best runner in the compound.

Therefore, they dismounted, and waited for Tarzan, king of the jungle.

CHAPTER II

The Unknown Enemy

Tarzan had been away from Jane for close to ten days this time. They had been ten horrendous, days, filled with danger, hunger, death, and many battles. Tarzan had thrived upon them, although he would never tell their full story to his mate. She was, he thought to himself that last night, the most perfect of all mates, yet she remained a "she." And, as such, she would never be able to fully understand the call of the wild; the necessity to do battle to regain his manhood from time to time; the craving within his jungle-bred blood for the fresh and exciting blood of a fresh kill; the yearning within this great man for the pitting of himself against his beloved yet savage jungle. Even now, after these past days of triumph over danger, Tarzan was not quite satisfied. The blood stream within him, fed by the milk of his savage ape mother, demanded more.

So it was that the night before his return to his mate and to his own compromise with civilization that Tarzan lay awake. Tomorrow, he was thinking, I will be home. I shall be happy and glad to be home. However I have been almost ten days in my true home without being here.

He raised his strong body quietly, looking about the small encampment. Two warriors stood firm guard beside the fire that watched over the rescued children. A fire is a necessary thing in the jungle at night. It is made necessary by the fiery yellow eyes which watch from the darkness beyond its perimeter. As Tarzan's grey eyes swept about the site, his keen ears heard the moans and the coughing of the big cats. They were mingled with the many noises of other jungle beasts, and they combined to inflame the desire within the heart of John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, Tarzan of the Apes.

He watched the scene for almost an hour before the insistent need took hold of him. Then he rose, noiseless, somehow managing to blend into the jungle darkness before the very eyes of his Waziri warriors, and, vaulting the protective shrub, swung with ease into a tall leafy tree, and vanished from sight. Within a matter of seconds all traces of his hard-learned civilization vanished, and he raced happily and swiftly through the middle terrace, swinging gracefully from one giant tree to the next. In a short while he tired of this tame sport, and climbed rapidly up to the thinner foliage of the upper terrace, where Goro the moon watched his antics in silent splendor. Once at the top, Tarzan stopped for a moment, stared his defiance at Goro, and with an uplifted arm raised his face and let forth the cry of the giant bull apes who

had raised him from infancy. It was a hideous cry, and the jungle beneath him moved nervously at the sound. At the camp site the two silent warriors dared not glance at one another. Both knew the cry, both knew their master had gone out into the deep night—out into the jungle, looking for blood.

The only reply Tarzan received from his challenge was a nervous silence. Angered, and near desperation for combat, the great man descended from the upper terrace, sought and found a game trail, and with nostrils quivering set out upon the scent of Bara, the deer. It was a fresh spoor, and Tarzan was once again happy. Within a matter of moments, the scent of Bara told Tarzan his prey was almost at hand. Once again he took to the trees. He remained within the lower terrace so that he could keep his ever-keen eyes upon the trail beneath him. Within a matter of minutes the hunt-hungry ape-man spotted his prey. Bara was standing, as though waiting for his fate, at the very edge of a jungle clearing. For Tarzan it was one more stroke of good fortune that the deer stood directly beneath one of the giant trees which formed the perimeter of the clearing. He crept silently toward the beast, holding in his right hand the long, deadly hunting knife of his father, his heart pounding with the exciting challenge of the forthcoming combat. He reached the branch nearest Bara and paused less than two seconds before he leapt down upon the svelte back of the unsuspecting deer. His impact carried the animal to its knees with stunning swiftness. Before it could recover, Tarzan had found its heart with the weapon he carried. Bara was dead. Tarzan had found his food for the night. As he arose from the brief fray, and lifted his face to the moon preparing to voice his wild cry of victory—the cry of the bull apes which he had learned as a child—he was struck by a sudden strange silence, so deadly quiet in fact, that it sealed the lips of the huge man. Angrily, he swept his savage eyes about the moonlit clearing. He lifted his keen nostrils to the wind, sniffing as would a beast, for some odor to which he could connect this weird silence. From his lips broke a low, rumbling growl. There was no reply from the jungle night. The silence continued.

To meet this new challenge, Tarzan turned his back upon the trees, squatted down upon his fresh kill and cut a generous helping for himself from hind quarter. All senses keenly alert, the man waited. Nothing moved. No warning odor of hunting beast reached his quivering nostrils. No sound of throat nor movement reached his waiting ears. The ape-man growled another savage warning and tore a mouthful of fresh, newly killed meat from the portion he held in his hand. Again, he waited. Again, nothing happened. Only the eerie silence continued. For Tarzan, this was a matter of personal pride as well as a possible challenge to his well-being. The great man knew this particular portion of the jungle as completely as he knew every inch of his own holdings far to the south. Among its beasts he had both friends and enemies, all of which he knew. The silence told him one astounding thing. There was an interloper in his territory—a man, or beast, strange to the land, and a man, or beast, who portended danger to its inhabitants. The silence itself was the most ominous of warnings—a warning from both friend and foe. Realizing what the quiet might portend, although even his keen mind could not guess at the unknown, Tarzan suddenly and swiftly grasped the remainder of his one portion, and leaped into the branches of the large tree overhanging the scene. This move was not made from any form of fear. In the jungle, a man ruled by fear cannot live through one day and night. It was rather a move of calculated discretion. Knowing not who or what his new enemy might be, Tarzan retreated to allow himself the time and freedom of movement to discover it. Had he been on one of his lone forays into the wilds, Tarzan would have forced the issue then and there. However, the main civilized trait to have rubbed off on the ape-man during his years in London, and since his marriage to Jane, was that of responsibility. Twenty minutes away from this scene of danger slept the native children he had rescued but two short days earlier. To have left them in the care of his Waziri warriors for a brief fling in a friendly jungle was one thing. To leave them alone with those same Waziri warriors when the jungle was harboring a new and unknown danger was quite another. Tarzan stood quietly upon the great branch for a few more minutes, keen grey eyes surveying the scene beneath and around him. Still nothing but that ominous quiet. Finally he lifted his head and gave one last, full sniff of the slow jungle breeze. Then, dropping the remains of the hindquarter down into the clearing beside the dead deer, Tarzan swung higher into the trees, climbing rapidly into the upper terrace where there were lesser boughs so that he could move more swiftly, and

raced back toward the encampment of children and Waziri. Tomorrow, he told himself as he sped through the night, tomorrow after I get them all back safely, I shall return and seek out this strange thing. Behind him, the jungle remained brooding, fear-ful and quiet.

It was close to three o'clock the following afternoon when Tarzan, his warriors and the tired, frightened Mogambi children arrived within the confines of the compound. Their journey had been uneventful, although from time to time during the day that same awesome silence had fallen over the jungle—to such a degree that even the youngest of the children had noticed it, and known fear without knowing its reason. The Waziri had looked to their leader, Tarzan, for some form of explanation about the uneasiness which seemed to pervade his jungle. He had given them no verbal assurances, but the strong dignity and assurance with which he forged on through the brush and trees had hushed their trepidations—as Tarzan had known it would. He refused to dignify the silence enemy by any show of protection or by any form of discussion. It was as though by ignoring it, Tarzan would chase it from his world. Within himself the ape-man was not this calm and unworriedly it was against his code to show fear.

Tarzan had led the group surely yet unhurriedly back toward his vast farms. Each time they stopped to allow the young people a rest, the tall man had gone forward a half-mile or so, never leaving his charges too far behind, still with the hope that his mate Jane and his brave chieftain Basuli had come forth into the jungles to welcome him home, and with the hope that his first glimpse of his lovely wife would be without the encumbering clamor of the children. He had been vaguely disappointed as the morning wore on without a reply to his message. However, John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, was also distracted by the strange happenings of the previous night, so he did not give his usually alert and sensitive mind a chance to ponder upon this small change in the usual procedure.

The chaotic welcome which greeted them at the compound was such that it was several minutes before the women and the warriors sensed Tarzan's unease. Almost as one, when they did notice it, they knew the reason behind it. Where, they began to murmur among themselves, was the Lady Jane. Basuli's number one wife was the first to speak.

"Why," she muttered angrily as she approached the tall white man, "did you not bring my man and the Lady Jane back with you? Why," she added, her age allowing the tone of voice she used, "did you not feed these young ones from the food they brought you?" A stealthy glance from the old woman into the steely grey eyes of her master closed her mouth and brought dread into her heart. Where, she afraid to herself, where is my man and the woman? What harm has befallen them?

Tarzan walked swiftly to her side. "Which way did they go, Basuli's mate? When did they leave the gates? Where did they plan to meet me? And why," his voice lowered in withheld anger, "why was I not notified of their plans?"

Tageka, one of the older of the Waziri, had stood nearby during the short conversation between the old woman and Tarzan. Hearing the questions of his master, the warrior detached himself from the group of curious and worried listeners and, approaching the two, answered the man's questions for the now weeping wife of Basuli.

"They were to meet you at the great thorn boma, the one at the western edge of your land." His skinny arm swept in the direction of the low afternoon sun. "They left the gates shortly after high noon, Tarzan, and they both were riding." He lowered his voice, although every man and woman about them knew what next he would say. "Kamjei, our finest runner, set out early this morning to give you the

message. He was given instructions by the boy you sent to us. He was told he could not fail to intercept your group. Did you . . ." the older man studied Tarzan's face quietly, hopefully, "did you change your route in any way?"

Tarzan didn't hesitate in his reply. He had long been able to call on the Waziri. He knew and trusted them, but he knew their weaknesses as well as their strengths, and he still remembered the one time their fear had so beset their reasoning that they had left him in the hands of an enemy tribe determined upon destroying him. True, he recalled, they had returned in time to be of some assistance to his escape, but had been an ordinary man their return would have been far too late. Naturally, now, his first thought was of his wife Jane—and because he was with her, of the Waziri chief Basuli. Once he had found them, he would go out in search of the missing Kamjei. His swift mind was racing over the strange phenomenon of the silence which had filled the jungle, and the uneasy silences which had come about from time to time throughout this day. Had they, he wondered, anything to do with Kamjei's disappearance? He would not mention this to the Waziri. To do so would give them reason for unease if they should dwell upon it. So it was that when Tageka asked his question, Tarzan replied immediately, "We varied not more than a mile one way or another. My runner must have been overly tired from his hurried trip. In all probability he neglected to give Kamjei a portion of my instructions. But, as you say, he is our finest runner. He will realize something has gone astray, and either wait out the night or possibly is already on his way back. You said Lady Greystoke and Basuli were riding?" He directed his last question to the old woman whose weeping had begun to subside at the sound of Tarzan's strong and calm voice.

"Yes. They both rode."

"Have one of the boys bring a mount for me at once. I could make faster time on my own, but if they're still waiting at the boma, I think it best we all ride back together. I do not wish for Basuli to walk the distance." He smiled encouragingly at the old woman as he spoke. Before another minute had passed a young warrior had reached the stables, and without bothering to saddle the animal, had jumped upon a high-spirited Arabian thoroughbred; and was racing him back to Tarzan's side. As he slid off the beast, Tarzan was upon it, and with one quick wave of his hand rode rapidly off toward the west. As he passed through the gates he pushed down the errant thought of the silence. It had been to the north that the strange invaders had quieted his land. It couldn't have reached the west yet. Tarzan rode faster.

CHAPTER III

The Voice of the Jungle

As the late afternoon sun beat down upon Jane and her attendant Basuli, both were bent upon hiding their fears from one another. Several times during the long wait, Jane had found herself upon the verge of suggesting that they return, but each time she had stopped the words before they reached her lips. Several times also had Basuli had the same thought, and the same reaction. Both knew that to return would be to deny the greatness and infallibility of Tarzan. He would not fail them. Some delay might have overtaken him, but he had asked Jane to ride out, and he would not miss their rendezvous.

Added to the general restlessness of the long afternoon had been the frequent and strange silences which had overtaken the area. The first time it happened they spoke of it. The second time they ignored it. The third time they avoided each other's eyes. Once, in the midst of the phenomenon, both

turned suddenly toward the boma. A rustle, as though of someone or something moving about within its confines had attracted their attention. It stopped almost as quickly as it had begun, so that neither Jane nor Basuli could have sworn they'd actually heard "something." Both knew that neither man nor beast would travel within the boma. The very reason for its great protective value was its inhospitality to the flesh of mortal creatures. One could always stand before a boma, and know oneself safe from assault from *that* particular area. The huge man and the small woman both smiled self-consciously. Jane gave a half-shrug of her shoulders as if to say "We're imagining things." Basuli answered the shrug with an equally expressive gesture of his hands. They continued to wait, and they tried to ignore those awful silent periods.

From time to time, when Basuli would turn his back and start another period of staring into the distance as if he could force Tarzan into appearing, Jane would turn and stare into the boma. Once she had the sensation that a pair of red-rimmed eyes were staring back at her, but as she blinked to sharpen her vision, once again there was nothing. The afternoon heat, she told herself. But she remained uneasy, and moved closer to Basuli, staring westward with him.

The sun was sinking closer to the horizon, clouds of blazing scarlet, purple and golden hues floating above it when the sound of galloping hooves reached the ears of the two waiting people.

"Tarzan! It must be Tarzan!" Jane jumped eagerly to her feet. "But what's he doing on horseback? And why is he approaching from that direction?"

Basuli grasped her arm gently, and moved her nearer to the boma. "Please, my lady. You will wait here for a moment." He walked swiftly over to their horses, untying them from the small tree that had served as their hitching post for the long wait. He led them back to Jane. "I think it's best if we mount " he told her, as the cloud of dust which concealed the approaching rider drew ever closer, "It is most certainly either Tarzan or someone from the compound. However, it is best we be ready to move quickly if it is some stranger . . ." He did not add the words "or some enemy." He did not need to do so. The afternoon had been weird enough already. Jane understood.

The rider was almost upon them before the dust about him cleared, and the beloved form of her husband was identifiable to the waiting woman. With a cry of joy, she jumped from her horse, and ran the few scant feet separating them to greet him. He, in turn, was off his mount before he'd pulled her to a halt. The two embraced wordlessly as Basuli turned to gaze at the sunset.

"I was so worried about you, my darling." Jane was on the narrow edge of tears. "But I knew you would come for me. I don't know why you are late, but nothing matters now. You are here, and oh, Tarzan, please don't leave me again—not for a long time."

The great man held his mate tightly in his arms, smiling despite her tears at the use of his jungle name. Since their marriage Jane Clayton had tried to speak to him only as "John" when they were together. Before the warriors, on one of their mutual forays into his jungle, she might call him Tarzan, but in his arms, and on their own lands, she wanted him to be John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, her civilized husband. Her use of "Tarzan" at this point only served to tell him how truly worried and frightened she had been. So engrossed was Tarzan with the comforting of his wife that his amazingly keen ears failed to detect the deadly silence surrounding him once again. Perhaps because of the horrible afternoon she'd spent, Jane was extraordinarily sensitive. It was her sudden stiffening that reached Tarzan first, and within a second he realized that the new enemy had indeed encroached upon the western areas of his land. Basuli's fear was evidenced by his interruption of the husband and wife—something the Waziri never did to their respected lord and his lady.

"Tarzan, Lady Jane, it is best we ride back while there is still a little bit of light, no?" the tall warrior approached them. Actually, Tarzan was grateful for the interruption. He did not want to discuss the silence with Jane. He did not want to tell her—not immediately—that he must leave her again, very soon. He must track down Kamjei. And he must find the thing behind the quiet—the thing that dared invade the land of Tarzan of the Apes. Gently, he disengaged her arms from about him. "Basuli speaks wisely, Jane." Tarzan led her toward her waiting horse. "We shall ride back to our home while there is still light. There we will talk. There I will explain the happenings of the day to you." Jane, encouraged by the fact that Tarzan had evidently not noticed anything untoward, told herself she'd given in to her imagination, and happily mounted her horse to start home. She shuddered, however, at the sudden noise of the hooves.

By the time the three riders reached the compound of the Clayton estate, all of the Mogambi children had been fed and bedded down for the night. Tarzan and Jane left Basuli to the somewhat less than tender ministrations of his number one wife, and went into their bungalow together. The trusting Waziri women had set the table for supper, clean clothes were laid out on the beds, and the bathrooms were deep in thick, soft and spotless linens. Concealing his concern for the missing Kamjei, Tarzan spoke softly and warmly to Jane. "I rather suspect, my darling," he smiled, his grey eyes moving tenderly over her tired face, "that both of us will feel much better after a good civilized shower, and a fairly sumptuous meal." Laughing, he added, "Tell cook to have dinner ready in half an hour. Then, let's dismiss everyone and spend the evening alone together."

"Oh, John," Jane joined him in his laughter, "it is so good to have you back at home. I know how much you love your jungle—I, to, have grown to love it. But it's better for me when we're here. Even though I know that so many of your trips out there," and she made a vague encompassing gesture covering the jungle outside, her voice losing its laughter, sobriety and concern toning it down, "that most of them are to help those in dire need, and even though I know I wouldn't let you refuse to go if you should ever think of such a thing—still, John, I must be honest. It's nicer here."

"I know, Jane. I know." Tarzan heaved a deep sigh, thinking of the news he must give his wife shortly. "Now, let's not think of those many trips this evening. You talk to cook. I'll take my shower."

Although the welcome-home dinner the Waziri women had prepared for Lord and Lady Greystoke was a small masterpiece of the culinary arts, both of them failed to do it justice. Tarzan was unable to completely conceal his distraction from Jane. She, on her part, was still uneasy from the strange happenings of the afternoon. As a matter of fact, her mind was so preoccupied with the imagined noises in the boma, the red-rimmed eyes she "thought" she had seen, and those awful silences, that it was not until they had retired to their study for coffee that she thought to ask Tarzan why he had missed their rendezvous.

For a moment Tarzan was at a loss for words. He had hoped to temporize until the morning. It was not, he'd assured himself, as though Kamjei was endangered for these few short hours he was giving his wife. If he'd fallen prey to the new enemy, it had already happened. If he had managed to evade the new this long, he would be able to do so another few hours. Then Tarzan realized that Jane herself had shown him the way—a short time earlier when she had said: ". . . wouldn't refuse to go if you should ever even think of such a thing . . ."

"I had not spoken of this before, Jane, because I have but just returned from a long absence. But you must know very soon, so you may as well be told now."

"I have fear in my heart, John, that you have bad news of some sort for me."

"I missed our rendezvous this afternoon, not because I changed my route so that Kamjei did not reach me—nor because my runner failed to instruct him correctly. I did not meet you, Jane, because something—or someone—prevented Kamjei from meeting me. I must go back into the jungle and find him. I will have to leave very early in the morning.

"I should have known at once, there could have been no other reason. But everything was so strange today." She stopped speaking, turned her large eyes fully upon her husband. "Tarzan, did you not notice the strange silence that hit the boma shortly after you arrived?"

"Yes, Jane. But I could conceal my reactions because I was surrounded by it last night, and from time to time throughout today's journey. My friends in the jungle were as silent as my enemies. Something new is out there."

"Kamjei . . . ?" there was a shudder in her voice.

"That is what I suspect," answered Tarzan.

"But what can it be? How can you help him if you don't know who—or what has harmed him?" Again, she shuddered.

"Whoever, or whatever, the fact remains, I cannot have anything or anyone bringing new danger to the jungle. I have fought too long to bring safety and peace to my people. First it is Kamjei. If he is not found, or his enemy punished, who knows who will be next? There is nothing to do but to return to the trail Kamjei took and try to track him down—try to find out the silencer of the jungle beasts. There is simply nothing else to do."

"Oh, John," cried Lady Greystoke, "find Kamjei, yes—but what terrible thing could silence all the beasts of the jungle? I cannot bear to think of you out there fighting some frightful strange being. I would rather leave Africa, live always in London or America, rather than to lose you to something—I know not what."

"Jane, Jane," and Tarzan was laughing, "you are such a frightened little girl. What has happened to you? Have you forgotten that I am Tarzan? I am able to take care of myself, you know. And I shall take care of my people. Kamjei is one of them. I shall take Basuli and possibly as many as four or five other Waziri with me. No harm will befall us."

"There must be another way. It's too soon. You've just come back."

"There is no other way, Jane. You know that. I know that. Come now, let us not ruin this evening in fear of tomorrow. That is not the way I have taught you, and I have come to believe you've learned my lessons well." His voice was tender but filled with a finality that told Jane further arguments would be to no avail.

The next morning at breakfast, Jane Clayton was calm, and on the surface unworried, as she listened to her husband's preparations for his departure. She did not, however, find it an easy thing to meet the questioning eyes of Basuli's number one wife.

Tarzan and the six Waziri reached the clearing where Kamjei had first heard the dread silence within a matter of hours after they'd left the compound. His trail had been so clear and easy to follow that Tarzan had marched with the Waziri, instead of forging on ahead in search of clues, and the jungle this morning was filled with the usual screams of the big cats, chatter of monkeys and the hum of millions of

insects, so Tartan did not backtrack as was his wont.

The five Waziri remained at the edge of the clearing as Tarzan and Basuli approached the clear pool, studying Kamjei's prints which would not have been discernible to the civilized eye, clear as the printed word to the two men of the jungle. Tarzan stood for a moment beside the pool, looking forward intently, backward, then to both left and right, as well as upward. Basuli was watching him closely. It was, indeed, a rare sight to see the ape-man puzzled.

"That's odd," he muttered, almost beneath his breath. "He was here. He sat here and stared into the pool. He went no closer, so his danger came not from the water." He turned to look at Basuli, who nodded his agreement, but ventured no helpful remarks. Tarzan stopped to finger the grassy embankment upon which Kamjei had sat. "There is no sign of struggle, yet something—I don't know." He remained stopped, gazing at the spot. Finally he stood, and motioned Basuli to one side. He signaled to the five warriors at the edge of the clearing to remain where they were. "Basuli?"

"Yes, Tarzan. It is strange, is it not?"

"Something forced Kamjei's body deeper into that grass than his own weight could have. Some kind of weight pressed him down. Yet there is no sign of a struggle, and the weight which hit him was not strong enough to have knocked him out. And there is no track leading from this spot. It's as though he had vanished into thin air." As he spoke the last words, both he and Basuli glanced involuntarily toward the trees; the two sparse ones to one side of Kamjei's last appearance, and the fairly large one just above it. "Wait here for me, Basuli," the ape-man said, as with a graceful gathering of his sinewy muscles he jumped into the air, reaching one of the lower branches and clambering rapidly into the large tree. Basuli stood, watching his master disappear into the leafy foliage. Once out of sight, no man would have been able to detect Tarzan's presence in the heights of the tree. Within a matter of a few minutes his strong voice floated down with new instructions for his Waziri chieftain. "Basuli, have your men set up a small camp here, in this clearing. I have discovered something which might lead us to Kamjei"

"Do you not wish us to follow the trail with you, Tarzan?" called up the worried warrior.

"Not at this time, Basuli," replied Tarzan. "This is a very strange thing, and I know not where it will lead. But wait here for me. If I have not returned within the hour, send a boy back to the compound for more of your warriors. I shall leave a trail for you to follow, should it become necessary. Above all, Basuli . . ." and a branch in the tree was moved aside as the face of the ape-man came into view, "say nothing of this to Lady Jane. She is not to be disturbed. If possible, tell your runner to bring the other men without her knowledge." The face broke into a steely smile which was belief by the graveness of the eyes. "More than likely we shall not require the other men, but it is good to be prepared."

"He will leave immediately, Tarzan. The rest of us will wait here."

"He is not to leave for one hour, Basuli. It is important that you follow my instructions implicitly."

"We will set up the camp. And he will wait until the sun reaches the top of the tree."

"Good, Basuli."

The warriors at the edge of the clearing moved forward as Basuli began issuing rapid orders to them. As they were preparing their small campsite, none of them saw the tall figure of the ape-man leap down from the tree, sprint across the narrow space of clearing and swing once again into the giant trees surrounding them. The noises of the jungle seemed to grow into a gigantic crescendo as Tarzan departed.

They had, to Basuli's ears, an ominous sound of warning.

CHAPTER IV

Kamjei's Horror

Kamjei was never to remember the horror of the journey which took him from the clearing to the strange city in which he awakened. But the horror to which he opened his eyes would remain emblazoned upon his brain until death released him.

The red-rimmed eyes, the face that had grown in the small pool until it became a reality, and the incredible body upon which it had been so grotesquely placed were seated next to Kamjei, waiting, it seemed, for his wakening. The eyes stared into his, as they had at the clearing, but no longer with the hypnotic effect it had held then. It was a human face—or it was, to say the least, far more human than one of the great apes which Kamjei had seen once when on a trip with Tarzan. It was fairly long, of a dull reddish hue which reminded Kamjei of a rifle left in the jungles during the great rains, remaining there during the long days of sun, and discovered after it had surrendered to the rust and rot of the land. It was sparsely but definitely blotched with what appeared to be either large pimples or small boils. Its nose was elongated but at the same time flattened, and the jaw went from a prominent jut to a soft curve on the left side. The red-rimmed eyes which stared at Kamjei were lidless and the brows above them a barely defined line of color, rather than of hair. They seemed, to the terrified Kamjei, to reflect both bestiality and ferocious contempt. It was when the creature opened its mouth to speak that the native knew true terror. For the violently purple tongue was forked, and the sounds which emanated seemed to come from the tongue itself rather than from the throat or vocal cords. Quick as a flash, Kamjei found his eyes torn from the menacing face and fastened in horror upon the body. For this head, this human face, topped the coils and dry scaling undulating length of a gigantic snake! It had been the sight of this body unwinding from the leafy branches of the tree that had terrified Kamjei into a state of shock as he sat in the jungle clearing. Now, realizing that he had fallen into the clutches of some strange mutant, Kamjei felt the fear and disgust re-enter his body. As he looked back at the face, he caught a glimpse of sadness, and menace, both blanked out quickly by an odd expression of overpowering fear. The forked tongue spewed out a series of sounds which seemed to be a curse, and with an incredible burst of speed the thick snake-like body uncoiled itself and dived crashingly through the tangle of green which covered the entrance to Kamjei's room. It was then, as Kamjei tried to move, that he discovered he had been gently firmly bound with a mass of thin reed-like ropes. Head reeling with terror Kamjei lay back to await his captor's return.

For some time the warrior lay there in a torpor, fearing the sight or sound of another of the snake people, yet fearing his loneliness as well. He lay almost as one dead. At length he stirred and was again amazed at the freedom the reed bonds allowed his movements. They seemed more a restrictive means than a form of imprisonment. Kamjei struggled slowly but surely toward the shrub-covered entrance through which the strange snake-man had disappeared. He had not the thought of escape in his mind, but some instinct that if the light of day were still shining all was not lost. Reaching the entrance he stretched out a reed-wrapped hand to push aside the brush, but almost as he touched it, it moved itself. He was too filled with amazement to wonder this action. His place of imprisonment seemed to be high in the side of a rocky cliff. From the entrance way he could see a number of other shrub-covered patches, which appeared to be the mouths of similar cliff-cells. Interspersed between them were clearly defined entranceways, each fronted with large metallic discs which seemed to reflect the light of the sun a

million-fold. As Kamjei turned his head to the right, his attention was caught by an entrance way which was far larger, and which was fronted by far more elaborate discs, than the others he had seen. It was also guarded by six of the snake-people, two on either side, and two coiled ominously directly in front of the opening. Kamjei's heart sank again. When he'd discovered his freedom of movement, despite the reed bonds, and when he'd reached and removed the shrub at the entrance to his prison, he'd held a faint hope that he'd been captured by one strange mutant, and might possibly be able to escape him. The sight of the other entrances had not penetrated his mind as it should have, but the sight of the six snake-men guarding the big cave did. He was among a city of snake-people. There was no hope for escape. Kamjei fell forward, swooning with terror once more. It was thus that the Snake Queen and her courtiers found him.

When Tarzan left Basuli and his men at the clearing, he was still puzzled. In the tree above Kamjei's last resting place the ape-man had discovered traces of the movements of a gigantic snake, a snake larger than any he knew in his jungle. Yet, some of those traces seemed to have been deliberately left. Others seemed unlike a snake. Staying in the lower terrace although it limited his speed in movement, Tarzan followed the trail which lay clearly before his eyes. Clearly, yet defying belief. Kamjei's presence was indicated only occasionally. Had he gone along willingly, Tarzan wondered, hiding his own trail behind him. If not, how could a snake, no matter how huge, manage to drag a human body without leaving a trail which could be read by an idiot? How, for that matter, the ape-man wondered, as he swung across a crocodile-infested body of water to a leafy bough on the other side, could a snake of this size manage to hide so much of his own trail? And what kind of snake was this that managed to travel from tree to tree, descending to the jungle pathways only from time to time? Someone, he thought to himself, has dared to try to confuse Tarzan of the Apes. They have left the trail of a snake, but they have left a trail no snake could leave. They are fools! And when I find them they shall be punished for attempting to make a fool of Tarzan!

Intrigued as he was with the problem, Tarzan did not think of the time. It was only when the pangs of hunger made themselves known that he realized Basuli would have long since sent a runner back to his compound; long since received the reinforcements of Waziri. The trail of Kamjei and his captor was growing ever more fresh by now. Tarzan could not—would not turn back. But Tarzan was hungry.

Gracefully, the ape-man dropped to the ground as he spotted the game trail beneath him. Through the use of ages of jungle beasts the trail had become a deep, narrow trench. The walls of this trench were topped on either side by an impenetrable thicket which joined with densely growing trees and thick-stemmed creepers and vines to compose rampart-like walls of impassable vegetation. Tarzan was approaching the point where the game trail opened to the river when he sniffed the wind keenly almost at the same time he saw a family of lions approaching from the other direction. They were four. Numa, the father, one full-grown lioness and two partially grown cubs. They would soon be as large and as formidable as their male parent. Tarzan halted and growled his warning. The lions came to a dead stop, as Numa, the great male in the lead, bared his fangs and gave forth a roar of defiance to this strange creature.

In his hand the ape-man held his heavy hunting spear. Hungry though he was, he had no intention of fighting Numa for food. Tarzan did not eat the meat of carnivores except in times of extreme necessity. This was not one of them. However, asking of the jungle, Tarzan could not back away from Numa. So he stood there, growling his defiance and roaring, just as the lion did. It was an exhibition of pure jungle bluff, on both sides. Numa could not give way before his family. Tarzan would not give way within his jungle. How long this duel of defiant and meaningless roaring might have continued it is difficult to say. The bedlam, however, had been so great that Tarzan failed to hear the great beast which was hurtling

down on him from behind until a split second before it reached him. He whirled about to see Buto, the rhinoceros, eyes blazing madly, charging him, death evident in every step he took. He was so close as Tarzan turned that escape seemed impossible. Tarzan had not received his training from the great apes in vain. So perfectly were his mind and his muscles coordinated, so well did he know every one of his beast foes, that he had hurled his spear toward Buto's heart in the same moment that he'd turned. Even as he threw the spear, the ape-man leaped into the air. So close had Buto been, that Tarzan alighted upon his back, escaping the horn which had been poised to kill him. Buto screamed with pain, and, spotting the lions, decided they were responsible for this agony. As he bore madly down upon them Tarzan leaped nimbly into a branch overhead. The second cub was the first to meet Buto's charge, and as he was buried screaming and dying over the rhino's back, his enraged mother and father assaulted the wounded beast, ripping and tearing him as he gored and trampled them. From the safety of his perch Tarzan looked down, keenly interested. Ordinarily, he knew, Numa would have had little chance against the maddened Buto. But Tarzan's hunting spear was a heavy one, shod with iron, and it had cut deeply into the rhino's chest. And Numa had the love of a father for his cub, and the deep anger of the father for his dead child. The lioness's ferocity matched her mate's. So it was that Tarzan of the Apes watched the unusual duel to its unusual finish. There were no winners. The remaining cub had slunk fearfully back along the game trail as the gory battle progressed. He was too young to survive long in the jungle without the help of his parents. Buto finished off Numa first, then the enraged lioness met his horn and her death. As he stood over them, the blood spouting from his torn flesh, Tarzan's spear still within him, he sank slowly to his knees, then rolled over on his side. Buto was dead. The sounds of the battle still echoed in the vast jungles as Tarzan descended from his perch, cut his spear from the rhino's body and hacking a steak from his flank, vanished back into the trees. Tarzan would retire to the middle terrace, eat his meal, then continue on the trail of his missing runner, Kamjei.

Back at the clearing, Basuli was in the midst of an almost equally ferocious battle with the badly frightened Tageka. For the runner who had returned to the compound for additional Waziri had not had the cunning nor imagination to evade the questions of the worried Jane, Tarzan's mate. Nor, to give him—as well as Basuli—their due, had either been aware of the unexpected visitors who had arrived on an urgent humane mission at the Greystoke ranch that morning.

Basuli knew he was to set out after Tarzan. His master had given him clear instructions. Tageka had known he was to roust up the additional warriors without frightening Jane; even, for that part of the arrangement, without letting her, know he was back. When Tageka arrived back at the campsite with his Waziri friends, Basuli was happy. But when Jane Clayton, Lady Greystoke, and her strange friends walked in behind the first Waziri, Basuli was a person of vastly confused emotions. He had let down the great white-skinned ape-man ; he must think as would that man as to how to take care of the frail people; he must use his wits and his wiles to escape from the campsite and trail Tarzan without others knowing of it. Therefore, the wild argument. Basuli, blaming Tageka. Tageka, trying to apologize and explain, at one and the same time. This extraordinary scene was still going on as Jane was trying to make her new, equally strange guests at ease, and as the sun went down.

The silence, missing throughout this day, returned.

CHAPTER V

The Three Strangers

As the great ball of fire that was the jungle sun began to sink toward the treetops of the western swale a sense of renewed urgency entered the heart of Tarzan. He had traveled far that afternoon, and was now in a portion of the jungle which was new and strange to him. For some time he had been aware of a low, rumbling sound, a continuous murmur which seemed to emanate from the jungle before him. As he moved, now cautiously, through the lower terrace, the sound became louder. It was, the ape-man thought, strangely like the bubbling of a soup in some great iron cauldron. Suddenly he came upon the source of it. He reached a small clearing, fantastically hued by the setting sun. In the center of it was a lake made not of water, but of a black, almost pitch-like substance. The surface of the lake rose and fell in anguished boiling movement, and the ground of the clearing about it was covered by a steam-like haze. As Tarzan gazed out at it from the slight branch upon which he stood he wondered when the original volcanic outburst had occurred. It must, he thought to himself, have been many years ago; it must also, he realized, been of tremendous force, as the bubbling like before him was proof that the volcano had not yet spent itself. Mounds of lava and black rocks were strewn wildly about the clearing. The setting sun gleamed suddenly upon a strange, snake-like path which wound itself across the clearing, about the lake, and disappeared into a rocky cliff on the far side. Without thought of personal danger or hazard, Tarzan of the Apes leaped lightly down from the tree and ran swiftly along the dark path. For the sun's glare had shown Tarzan not only the path, but indications of recent passage along it—the same type of indications he'd been following all day. Somewhere on the other side of that volcanic pool, Tarzan knew he would find Kamjei, his number one runner.

As he reached the forbidding cliff, he heard a multitude of strange, sibilant callings. They seemed, to the wily ape-man, to be guiding him toward their source. He reached a cleft in the rocks which was an obvious entrance to some strange habitation beyond. Again, without hesitation, but with all his jungle wiles and alert senses working for him, Tarzan entered the cave. It was a small cavern, dimly lit by the remaining rays of the sun. There was a small opening on the other side, and Tarzan was forced to stoop to pass through it. As he straightened up, he looked about in utter amazement. He was standing in an enclosed garden. Trees, shrubs and riotously colored jungle flora grew in wild confusion, yet, at the same time, seemed to have a semblance of some strange formal garden. It was evident that the spot was not generally used because the one small path which displayed itself to the naked eye was half overgrown with plants and small bushes. Tarzan turned to look back toward the cave-entrance. To his surprise it seemed to have disappeared. He decided it was but a trick of the setting sun, a mirage-like effect which would disappear as soon as the sun moved a bit farther down on its path.

"You are late, oh great tarmangani. We have been waiting for you long. Now we must wait for the dawn before we may meet with you.

Tarzan wheeled about abruptly, and for the third time in as many minutes met a sight which stunned him with surprise. A young and beautiful woman stood erect and with a certain sweet arrogance, in the center of the obscure pathway. By the standards of any land she would have been accounted lovely, although even in the dim light Tarzan was struck by the strangeness of her red-rimmed eyes. It was the sinking sun again, he thought to himself. Once it was gone all would take the proper perspective in this strange cliff garden.

"Have you knowledge of my runner, the Waziri called Kamjei?" Tarzan did not ask the lovely woman who she was, nor how she had known he would be arriving. He had come after his man, and only after his first mission had been successful would the ape-man concern himself with other matters.

"Of course I have, Tarzan of the Apes. He is with us. He has not been harmed, although I must tell you he is somewhat of a coward!"

"None of my Waziri are cowards!" the ape-man replied harshly, grey eyes turning steely and

cold.

"Kamjei is. But then, perhaps the sight of my people is such a strange thing that even the bravest of your kind lose heart."

Tarzan detected a sad inflection beneath the woman's voice, and now, knowing that Kamjei was safe, his instinctive curiosity came forth.

"Who," he spoke softly, "are you? And who are your people that they should put fear into the heart of a brave warrior?"

"Come with me, Tarzan," the beautiful woman replied. "I cannot introduce you to any of my people now. The sun has gone down. They will stay in hiding dawn. They must, or they will be killed." She reached over to Tarzan and took his hand, to lead him down the path toward her quarters. The ape-man was astounded by the dry coldness of her touch. An involuntary shiver went down his strong spine. It was, he thought, like walking hand in hand with a snake!

Basuli had made his decision. He would not leave the campsite to follow Tarzan until the next morning. He knew full well that Tarzan would be angered should he leave Jane in the jungle without giving her his personal protection. Tarzan would also be angry when he discovered that his wife was not safely at home within the compound, but Basuli was sure she would explain to him that it was not the fault of Basuli. He stood to one side of the small clearing, watching Jane Clayton and the three strange men who sat in front of the blazing campfire and talked to one another. He, Basuli, Chief of the Waziri, did not like these strange white men. They had a smell about them which bred distrust. Basuli would watch over Tarzan's wife throughout the night. He would depend upon no other warrior to do the job.

"I'm positive Lord Greystoke will be back to the camp, if not during the night, then surely early in the morning." Jane Clayton was addressing the eldest of the three men.

"We are aware, Lady Greystoke, that your husband is the only man in Africa who can help us. His story, his childhood, his life as Tarzan of the Apes, is well known to all who study the jungle and its secrets." The speaker was Leopold Keinin, a swarthy Belgian of forty hard-lived years. His English was practically without accent, although an occasional word gave evidence it was not his native tongue.

"We would have gladly awaited him at the compound. my dear lady," added the second of the three men, Pierre Sortie. While he claimed French nationality the practiced ear would have denied his accent. It was definitely not French, unless one might conjecture it was the France of Alsace-Lorraine—where mostly German is spoken. Jane Clayton, the wife of Tarzan, however, was a most trusting woman. Sortie claimed to be French. She would believe him until he was exposed as a liar. Then she would be sorry for him.

"But if what we believe to be true is true, every hour is of the utmost urgency. We thank you for understanding our problems, and appreciate your coming into the jungle with us. To you, Lady Greystoke, this land is practically home. To a stranger it is a fearsome place. Watching you relax within it is most reassuring to the three of us." Bill Harvey, the youngest of the three, was already the favorite of Tarzan's wife. There was a certain air of youthful sincerity and earnestness about him which had impressed her from the beginning. Also, and Jane Clayton was a bit ashamed of her chauvinism, his

obvious American accent and cheery brashness was, to the Baltimore-bred woman, a welcome reminder of home.

"You, too, would be relaxed and confident herein the jungle, if you had learned its secrets from my husband. This is his land, you know. Even the great apes acknowledge this. Oh, from time to time there is trouble, but Tarzan always manages to get it cleaned up. You have come to the right place, gentlemen. I know my husband will help you find your lost friend—and I know he will find him in time. Now, if you'll excuse me, I shall retire for the evening. Sleep well. The Waziri are the bravest warriors in all of Africa. They will let no harm befall us." Jane stood up, waved a quick goodnight to the three men, who, unused to the quickness of jungle movements, were still struggling to get to their feet. She moved lithely toward her small sleeping tent. There, she turned and looked up toward Goro, the moon, who seemed to be smiling protectively toward her. As she brought her eyes down to the earth again, she was startled for a moment. She'd imagined she had seen a pair of red-rimmed eyes, glaring maliciously at her from the swale. She shook her head, and when she looked back, there was nothing. Jane walked into her tent and lay down to await the arrival of Tarzan. Outside the night was still silent.

CHAPTER VI

The Challenge of Tarzan

She had told him her name was Lyta. And as they sat before the fire in her well-protected cave-like quarters, she had continued with a story that taxed the imagination of even the great ape-man, and drew, to his face, an expression of stern, worried disbelief.

The flickering lights of the multitude of fires which surrounded not only the entrance to her quarters, but which burned fiercely in every even slightly dimmed corner of the spacious room, heightened the woman's beauty as well as her strangeness. She sat—had she been less of a beauty one might say she almost *coiled*—beside the throne-like a piece of furniture which was the largest and most ornate object in the chamber. Her slender, well-shaped arms draped despondently about the legs of her throne. As she spoke, her expressive face and enormous eyes changed expression constantly, from that of burning, white-hot anger, to that of pleading, gently submission, and swinging the pendulum of emotions back to a seething, almost molten mass of hatred for the object of her disdain. Lyta was very beautiful. By the standards of any race, she was physically a creature of the utmost perfection. And, as her story unfolded, even Tarzan felt a sense of sorrow that this beautiful and desirable woman was tied to a fate that would always keep her lonely. Her full bosom rose and fell rhythmically as she spoke, and the strange lids which sometimes fell abruptly to cover her eyes could not completely hide the admiration for the ape-man that seemed to grow within her as she spoke.

Intrigued as he was by her tale, Tarzan was masculine enough to recognize the warning signals of those blazing eyes. So it was that each time he felt an empathy for this high priestess and her strange followers, it was almost immediately removed from his being as he repulsed her obvious desires.

"You seem strangely alone in this vast cliffside, Lyta." The grey eyes studied her keenly as he spoke. "Yet, beyond the fires surrounding your doorway, my eyes see many other flickering lights, which would indicate that your people are here—but not with you?"

"It is a strange tale, Tarzan. I cannot prove all of it to you tonight, and I know that I must prove it

before you will help us." She turned her strange, slumbrous eyes up to stare deeply into his searching grey gaze. "My people are not of your world. We have known of you since first you were a child with the mangani. No one in the furthest reaches of the jungle has not heard —rather, not failed to hear of Tarzan of the Apes. You, however, would never have known of us had it not been for Narda."

"Narda?" The voice of Tarzan was troubled. This was a new, a strange name to him.

"My sister. My once-beloved sister. My bitter, enemy now. And, Tarzan," the voluptuous woman swung around with snake-like ease, "it is a man of *your* people who has corrupted her! Through corrupting her, he has started a war between the Snake People —the last, true people of our times!" She pulled her self erect, almost viciously, still with a weird, sinuous grace. "My people, Tarzan! Look into those corners so carefully guarded by fire. Tell me what you see."

The keen grey eyes peered cautiously beyond the nearest fire. The caution gave way to an amazed expression of discovery, then, immediately to complete disbelief. He turned back to Lyta, still standing before the fires guarding her chambers, her draped gown serving but to accentuate the lushly curved body beneath it.

"But, Lyta . . . they are not people. . ." The sinewy body whirled about, looking with the grey eyes, caution and strength in every movement " . . . they are snakes. Huge, actually enormous snakes, but Lyta . . ." and his grey eyes filled with pity as he turned to look the lovely woman full in the eye, "they are *not* people !"

She smiled, strangely, and moved very close to Tarzan. "I, Tarzan, am a woman—am I not?"

He could but nod.

"I told you I could not prove everything tonight. We are hindered by night. But I can prove one thing to you. You are a brave man, oh tarmangani. The great apes knew and told us of you. You are also wily and wise. You have noted the unusual eyes Lyta has? No? Yes. You have concealed it well, but we Snake People see beyond the surface. It has been our foundation. Now, Tarzan of the Apes, watch this!" She moved, once again with incredible swiftness, and, standing before one of the corner fires, she bent down over it. From her mouth emanated a long, thin, and clearly forked tongue which whipped above the fire and struck the coiled snake behind it. As the unbelievable tongue was retracted into the woman's full, petulant lips, the coils of the snake moved slightly to reveal to Tarzan of the Apes the same human head and gleaming red eyes which earlier had so terrified his runner.

Lyta turned back to face the ape-man "Now, Tarzan of the Apes, now will you hear my story —and least believe it *might* be possible?"

"The sight of the creature behind the fire had brought the runner Kamjei back to Tarzan's mind. What, he wondered to himself, would that poor devil be thinking of this? If Tarzan himself were amazed and shocked, how could his Waziri retain his senses?"

"I will listen, after you have returned Kamjei to me."

Her eyes flickered with dismay. "I cannot do that tonight, Tarzan," she replied. The ape-man moved toward the entrance. "But, if you will but listen, you will understand. You must believe me, he is all right. We brought him here but to bring you to help us. We've done him no harm."

The steely grey eyes were cold as they looked upon Lyta. "I shall give you," Tarzan answered,

"but ten minutes to bring my runner to me. Or, if you prefer, ten minutes to weave this strange story you speak of so often. Either way," and his sinewy muscles rippled in the firelight as he shrugged, "at the end of that time, I shall go after Kamjei myself, if your people have not returned him to me."

"The origin of our people," Lyta told Tarzan, "is lost within legend. We, ourselves, know not what is fact and what is fiction. We know only how it is with us, and how, to the best of our memories, it has always been. We Snake People are of two tribes. Once, it has been told, we were vast and powerful. Then something happened. It does not matter within this scant ten minutes you have allowed me. You saw one of my guards. Perhaps you wondered why he had his head hidden and seemed to sleep, while I, his priestess, sat here, with a stranger—perhaps an enemy—and unprotected. My Snake People can move, hunt, build, procreate, and do battle only during the hours of the sun. For many years our brother tribe protected us, for they—and their priestess is my sister Narda—are equally active during the hours of Goro the moon, and equally without protection during the sunlit days. Of both tribes, only my sister Narda and myself know both day and night.

"My people are a very old and great race—the first of the reptiles to attain the brain and heart of man. I will not bore you with our legends as to why—having attained so much—most of us have not been allowed to grow further. Once a year, three of the most skilled of our hunters, the most prolific of our fathers, the most protective of our tribes, are allowed to shed their dismal homes, their scaly, cold, dry skins. At the full of Goro, the moon, every November of every year, these three of our guards—actually, six altogether—three for me, and three for Narda—become men."

The cold eyes of Tarzan fixed themselves upon this woman of the snakes. Although all of it seemed less than possible, Tarzan himself knew the many strange secrets of the jungle—secrets which no white man would ever believe. He, actually, had been one of them. The parents he had known best of all—the great apes were but another. His eyes lost their coldness and became filled with a great interest, the curiosity which, for so long, had kept him king of the jungle. "And, during November . . . ?"

"As women, both Narda and I have met with many problems we could not handle. As women, also, both Narda and I need mates. It is forbidden— or," and her voice became suddenly most bitter, "it was forbidden, that we go with anyone not of our people. During the old Novembers, we met with our six men. They helped us with our problems. We made plans for living and eating and protection during the next many male-less moons. Then, on the last night, each of us would select a mate. And," her strange eyes looked imploringly at him, "for that night, that most wonderful night of the year, we were not both snake and person, we were man and woman! For that night, both Narda and I lived every day between."

"Were there—" the lean man's face was gravely puzzled.

"Our children?" Lyta's laughter was the most bitter sound Tarzan had ever heard. "We lay eggs. Hundreds of tiny eggs. The luckier ones die. The others are hatched, and become one of the tribe."

"And now?" "As I said, one of *your* people. A vast, ugly, evil-smelling member of your people, has become mate to Narda. He has made her war upon us. He has moved us from our homes, our safe, well-hidden homes in which we lived peacefully for so many years. Tarzan of the Apes . . ." she leaned forward dramatically, "he does not love her. There is something back there, something in our hidden valley that this evil man wants for his own."

"But . . ."

Tarzan was defeated at his attempt to interject. Lyta had been too many moons waiting for

someone to speak to about her problems. "You know, Tarzan, as does Bara the deer, Horta, the boar, even Numa, the lion . . . all beasts and men are animals. My people are helpless at night. Narda's tribe has always been our protector. But now, instead of protecting us, she and her vile mate seek ways of leading our enemies to us. She has corrupted her people, they too seek to destroy us. We . . ." and her voice rose in a sudden, sibilant hiss, "have nothing but the sun. And, if your mate is willing—you, Tarzan!"

For long moments the great muscular man sat beside the strange woman in deep thought. Then, almost as though realizing that having heard a tale of traitorous action, he must not become a part of one, he rose. "I shall give it much consideration, Lyta. First, however, I must bring Kamjei here, to certain safety."

"Tarzan," the woman was almost wailing, "You cannot go out into that night! Neither our God nor your God knows what the night snakes have lurking outside. He is safe. Kamjei is safe. Why, when we took him, to lure you, we had a snake-man watching over your mate, that no harm should befall her. Certainly you heard the silence, that dread silence with which your jungle greets us now that Narda and that vile man have turned them all against us ? "

Tarzan looked with pity upon the weeping priestess. "You came to Tarzan for help? You must then know that Tarzan fears neither man nor beast. If what you say is true, perhaps Kamjei has seen something which may be of help. But, even if he has not, Tarzan does not hide behind a small fire, nor a woman's pleas. I promise you, Lyta. I shall return with Kamjei. The waiting night holds no terror for me. Perhaps," he added, almost as an afterthought, "I shall, instead, put a bit of their terror into the hearts of Narda and her mate. What, by the way, does this human beast call himself?"

"It is a strange name to me, Tarzan. He is from another continent. He calls himself Leopold. Leopold Kein, I think."

Tarzan spoke sneeringly. "We shall see if he understands the language of a true man." He strode purposefully toward the cavern entrance. There, he lifted himself to his full height, lifted one of his muscular arms, and lips quivering but a moment, let forth the challenge taught to him by his jungle parents. The cry of the bull ape. And Narda, across the valley, heard the piercing scream, partly human, yet so hideous it might have emanated from a soul in hell. She shuddered, wishing her lover would return from the south hoping their plans for this night would work. And far to the south, the echo of the cry reverberated through the jungle. Jane Clayton heard it, and knew peace. Leopold Kein, Pierre Sortie, and their roommate heard it and knew horror. Leopold because he knew what it was. The others, because to them, any country in which such a cry could exist was not habitable by humans.

CHAPTER VII

The Night Battle

Once Bill Harvey had retired for the night, his two supposed friends drew together to whisper quietly of their most diabolical plan. For it was Leopold Kein who had first discovered the incredible wealth hidden in the Valley of the Snake People. And it was Leopold Kein, the erstwhile representative of the Belgian Society of Anthropological Knowledge, who had been given an honest grant for research, which was at this point ending in such a completely discredited demise. The first time Leopold had seen the radium, glowing brightly at night, he had thought it to be the eyes of another of the Snake People—with

whom he had easily made friends during his early days in their Valley. Both night and day tribes were, to the sophisticated European, more than naive. Before the next day had worn through, Leopold had studied the grounds, and by erudite questioning of the day priestess Lyta, learned that this precious element was worthless to her people, although guarded with care because of its night-emanating-light. His greedy mind immediately spied the possibilities of the untold fortune upon which he stood.

He had also immediately realized that should he relay his discovery to either the BSAK or the Belgian Government itself, he would end up with news clippings and perhaps a medal or two. But none of the fortune which he alone had discovered. Leopold had mulled over the problem for another week, still pretending friendship with both Narda and Lyta. He told Narda he loved her, that she must prove she was greater than her sister Lyta, and within a month the two tribes were at war. Leopold's first instinct had been merely to remove the Snake People from their homes so that he could steal their unknown wealth. As the plan began to mature, he had realized there was no way of doing the thing alone.

It was then that he had bidden a passionate farewell to Narda and returned to the dark streets of Brussels; and there found his brother in infamy, Pierre Sortie. In the dim, dingy bars of that city the two men had laid their plans. Leopold had heard of Tarzan from the dark Narda. For, frequently, he had sounded her out to see if she would consult with her sister regarding an ending to the war of the Snake People. Always Lyta had said, "Before I surrender to that beast, I shall call upon the King of the Apes to help us I "

Now Pierre spoke. "I have many friends among the merchant seamen of our kind. They will be willing to help us get the elements out of Africa, if we can get it to the coast—and, of course, for a goodly price. But, Leopold, how do we get it from this Valley of the Snakes? How do we get it out of their land, and through the jungles to the coast?"

"Easy, Pierre. Easier than you can begin to understand. Already I have turned the two tribes against each other. Already, I have forced them to leave their night-giving-lights alone, unguarded. Already, I have turned the priestess Narda and her sister Lyta into enemies. There remains but one step to take, and the world will be ours!"

"I fail to understand this step. The German looked deeply and with suspicion toward his new employer.

"The only help for Lyta is Tarzan, this English lord they call the King of the Apes. He rules the jungle—but one thing rules him. He has a mate. No man nor beast denies his love for her. She is the only thing that keeps him civilized, and the only thing that can stop him from wreaking his will upon all of Africa!"

"My friend, you do not make sense. The radium, how do we get it out?"

Already, while I speak here to you in this small *bier stube* , Narda is forcing her war upon Lyta. By the time we return—you and I, Pierre—Lyta will have called upon Tarzan for help. You must see their tribes to believe them. Even a man such as Clayton must do so. He will have to be trapped. Lyta knows this. Then he will have to be shown. Lyta knows this. Meanwhile . . ." the Belgian's grey lips were heavy with saliva, "you and I call upon this Jane Clayton for help. While Tarzan is helping Lyta, we help ourselves to his wife. Once he knows she is in our hands, the Jungle will be slave to us. *His* men will help us carry the uranium to the coast! He, Tarzan himself, might well protect us from the beasts. It will work, Sortie. It can't fail to work." And the saliva dripped ever more steadily down the evil man's chin.

"What about the Snake People? What about this priestess you have made love to?"

"They shall kill Tarzan and his wife, they shall be our passports to safety. Remember, I have left Narda alone, with my word that I shall return—and that I shall hold the mate of her enemy as hostage. These words I shall keep. It is then but a minor thing to ask her to have her tribe handle Tarzan, if necessary to kill him—he *is* her enemy—while I make another small trip to my country." The man laughed, to his companion, almost insanely. But the smell of millions was within the nostrils of Pierre. He could but nod.

"One thing else. And you must remember, when the time comes to share the wealth, that it was I—Leopold Keinin—who made this master plan. One must always allow for a mistake during an absence. So, we take with us, to the Greystoke estate, a man of innocence. A man, my friend, who truly believes he is helping the world learn its past."

"But who? Certainly another person. . ."

"You forget. I was with the Belgian Society. As far as they know, I still work for their interests. And some of the artifacts I have shipped to them have convinced them of my intellectual and earnest belief in my work. From them I have received many letters. There is, in Brussels tonight, a young American. I have seen him. I have checked out his background. If Lady Greystoke should have, by mischance, been warned against us—this fool, this Bill Harvey, is the perfect mask. He will meet us on Wednesday. You, Pierre, must remain quiet in his presence. He knows his business. I know more of it than he. You know nothing!"

"What happens . . ."

"We'll leave him to the Snake People—or Tarzan." His last words were spoken with strange fear.

Now, here, deep in the Jungle, Leopold was once again encouraging his partner in crime. For tonight was the culmination of the carefully laid plan. Tonight, Narda and her snake-men were to help Leopold kidnap the wife of Tarzan of the Apes. As they talked, Leopold had but to look about him, into the foliage behind the fires, and see the red-rimmed eyes of the night snakes, waiting but for his signal. It had been a shock to him to arrive at the Greystoke holdings and find a task force of Waziris already in the jungle, already in search of Tarzan. He had planned to take Jane out with but one or, at the most, three guards. But he worried not. He had seen his snake-men fight, and he was only too personally aware of the horror and hypnotic effect they had upon their first-time viewers. The silence told him they waited but his signal. He, in turn, waited the signal of the snoring of the innocent Bill Harvey, the inevitable relapse of the natives, supposedly (and he sneered inwardly) so brave and noble.

Time passed. And, as had Leopold Keinin expected, within a matter of an hour or less, all in the camp slept. All but Basuli, the faithful follower, and the two renegades. As Goro the moon began to brighten the clearing, Leopold put his two fingers between his teeth and made a weird, hissing sound. The slumbrous red-rimmed eyes which had edged the clearing became bits of wildly dancing flame. The first Waziri to feel the weight of the heavy coils screamed in terror, and his scream was choked out of hearing as his breath was choked from his life.

"Wait, Tarzan! Do not go out until I've told you of the many weapons Narda and her people will use against you."

The great man looked back at the woman with pity. "I have lived many moons in this jungle, Lyta. *I survive*. I have lived in the jungles of civilization; the jungles of the Belgian. *I survive*. No evil weapons can defeat Tarzan." As the beautiful woman moved across the room as if to stop the ape-man he leaped gracefully across the ring of fire surrounding the entrance to her quarters and disappeared into the dark of the night.

From across the Valley of Volcanos Lyta heard the mocking laughter of Narda, queen of the night snakes. Hearing it, Lyta shuddered, and prayed to her gods that Tarzan would live through the terrors of the night.

Outside of Lyta's quarters Tarzan stood silently for a moment, his huge and muscular body poised for immediate action, should Narda's snake-men make a move toward him. Head held high in the night air, Tarzan's nostrils quivered mightily as he sought the odor of Kamjei. Within a matter of seconds he had found that which he was seeking, and moved rapidly, though still with caution, down the narrow cliffside path toward the cave which held his runner. As he walked his keen eyes did not miss the shadows that melted at his approach into the concealment of the sparse foliage along the path. He did not waste his time in wondering why these enemies—for he doubted not a minute that they were the enemies—had not Lyta told him of the night immobility of her tribe?—wondering why they failed to assault him. As he neared the cave which his nostrils had told him held Kamjei, he gave the soft, low sound which was the secret cry of the Waziri. If Kamjei remained within his prison, the ape-man knew his signal would be answered. Had he been moved, and only his scent remained, Tarzan would follow it without wasting time to search the unknown cave. He paused for a moment, keen ears noting every whisper of the wind and rustle of the leaves. Suddenly, the soft low sound he had made came echoing back to him from within the cave, and Tarzan's ever-alert eyes, now accustomed to the darkness of the night, saw the figure of his runner moving toward the small fire before his prison's entrance. He moved rapidly across the short distance separating them. Safe within the knowledge of his own superiority, Tarzan walked the narrow ledge as if it were his own domain, each rock and stone as familiar as those within the compound far to the south. Suddenly the quiet of the night was shattered by a wild high scream from the direction of Lyta's cave. Glancing backward, Tarzan saw the curved figure of the priestess behind the ring of fire. She seemed to be writhing in agony, and as her screams grew in volume the shadows of the night came out from their concealment and converged about the ape-man.

"Stay where you are. Kamjei! Do not move from the protection of your fires!" As he called out, the scream of Lyta was all but drowned in a savage chorus from a hundred snake-men, over which echoed the evil voice of Narda, their ruler. As the first huge, reptilian-bodied man fell from the cliffside upon Tarzan, his sharp hunting knife was waiting. It found its goal as it sank deep into the throat of the evil thing, the hot blood it brought splattering over Tarzan and spilling in great gushes across the path. In almost the same movement, Tarzan bent and picked up the still-warm body of the gigantic snake-man, flailing it about as if it were a bull whip. Screams of terror joined in with the cacophony of the battle cries as snake-man after snake-man was knocked wildly from his encroaching positions across the pathway and over the edge of the sheer cliff.

As a second snake-man attempted to fall upon Tarzan from above, again the trusty hunting knife was ready. Again the warm blood spouted. This time, however, Tarzan did not use the body as a weapon, but threw it across the path upon the small fire before Kamjei's cave. Within moments the smell of burning flesh had added to the horrors of the night. Suddenly the voice of Narda rang across the scene in a series of sibilant, yet guttural sounds. The silence that followed her instructions was deafening, and broken only by the mournful wail of Lyta. Tarzan stood steadfast, ready for the next assault. As he turned his head slightly toward the right, in reaction to a soft, whistling noise, a blinding, stinging gush of poisonous venom hit the ape-man squarely in his face! The pain of the poison in his eyes and in his nostrils was maddening. As he fought to regain a position of defense, the snake-men poured across the

path. Unable to see, almost mad with pain, Tarzan went down before them.

Narda's voice echoed triumphantly across the valley of the volcanos. The only sound to answer it was the scream of agony wrenched from Lyta. Five of the snake-men began the slow process of moving the now unconscious figure of Tarzan down the steep cliffside and across the valley. Into the domain of Narda, and her night fighters.

The watching Kamjei knew shame and fear. He could not, however, bring himself to move out from behind his protective fire. And the cries of Lyta changed. They became curses for Kamjei—the only living thing on her side of the valley who might have helped Tarzan of the Apes.

Both Kamjei and Lyta, however, realized, as the dreadful night continued, that the loss of Tarzan had been their own first steps toward death and total defeat.

CHAPTER VIII

The Blood Drenched Clearing

The scream of Tamoyi, while it had been the last sound in his life, had served its purpose. For the entire camp awakened at the sound of his dying, angr agony.

While Keinin and Sortie were acting out their part supposedly in defense of Lady Greystoke, actually, her assailants, the Waziri warriors and Basuli were once again fighting a fierce fight in defense of that which belonged to Tarzan— that which their bravery had given them claim to—but only so long as their braver ran true blue.

For Bill Harvey the nightmare of the next few moments was to remain the nightmare of his life. From his friends, the men who had brought him into this scene, he sought help. It was only after several minutes wild, screaming assault that Harvey finally began realize his friends, and the so-called friends of the Greystoke family, were untrue!

Basuli, the beloved protector, who had shared many of the dangers and vicissitudes of the jungle with the beloved bwana, the King of the Apes, the ruler the Jungle, and only man the Waziri served, Basuli fought as though he were possessed by a demon. As the sleek, slimy, horrible bodies of the snake-mea surrounded him, their venom flying constantly toward his face, he constantly avoiding it, Basuli remembered that it was he, and he alone, to whom Tarzan had entrusted the care of the compound—and of his mate Jane. A giant instature, a savage, fearless warrior, Basuli assumed a strength that was not his! The huge warrior became possessed by soul and judgement in frightful proportion to his bulk and ferocity!

The night snake-men flowed, poured, sneaked, and raced in from their protective jungle.

Not since Jane had insisted on joining the group in the jungles had Basuli left her side. He had, himself, risked the anger of Tarzan, risked his failure to follow the well-laid trail, depending upon Tarzan's understanding about Jane. So it was that Basuli fought his way through the slithering snake-men to the mate of Tarzan. As he moved, his voice screamed instructions to his followers. His orders were lost amid the sounds of the embattled campsite. The Waziri who heard, and made an effort to battle, were

knocked down by Narda's people, or her vicious venom-spitting snakes defeated them.

As the night screams arose, Bill Harvey forced his attentions upon the Belgian and German companions he had thought his friends. Above the cacophonous noise Harvey himself added to it: "We must get together. We've got to save the woman. I don't know what is going on, but it's no place for her!"

Both men looked askance at Harvey. They turned from him, to encourage, while at the same time they pretended to fight, the Snake People.

"They're near her tent. Only one Waziri there to protect her. We've done it, Keinin! We've done it! Let's get rid of him." The German indicated the sweating American with a brusque gesture.

"Hold your tongue, you fool!" hissed -the Belgian in reply. "We might think we've succeeded, but we can't be certain until we get Jane Clayton back to the land of the Snake People." The sweating man looked about cautiously, still acting the role of protector, still playing the part of the offensive general. "It is a long trip through this jungle, and a very dangerous one during the night. We must pretend to be their prisoners, just as she will be."

"But you said . . ."

"Will you pay attention to me, Sortie? Should Tarzan have escaped our trap, we might well encounter him tonight. It is best we play our roles until we are safely back in the valley of the volcano. Already, I fear, young Harvey is suspicious of us. We cannot have that. He must remain with us until we are ready to rid ourselves of him. I shall kill one of Narda's snake-men now, so that Harvey will regain his confidence in us. Then, as you struggle with another, we will go down in defeat. But to the eyes of Jane Clayton and Bill Harvey, we will have gone down fighting in her defense!"

As he spoke the wily Belgian moved toward one of his unsuspecting allies, and, turning to call to Bill Harvey for help, plunged his long knife deep into the thick coil of the snake-man which served as his neck. Harvey, seeing his action, was at once ashamed of his earlier doubts. How could he have so misjudged this brave man?

The three men reached Jane Clayton's tent together, sweating, panting and disheveled. As they arrived, she stepped out of the canvas shelter, rifle in hand. More than one of the snake-men had accounted to her steady nerves and cool aim before the battle ended. Basuli reached the group then, and attempted to push his mistress back into the frail security of her tent, but she would not leave them. Bill Harvey, revolver in hand, ended the lives of several of the oncoming raiders, and Keinin and Sortie were forced to injure more of their hired killers in order to maintain the facade they had built up for their protection.

Again and again the snake-men charged the small group, having already either killed or blinded the Waziri who had fought the battle around the periphery of the campsite. Finally the sheer force of their overwhelming numbers turned the tables toward their victory. Keinin was the first to fall, victim to a small jet of poison venom which he himself had told the snake-men to use against him. Next was Sortie. Bill Harvey and Basuli stood before Jane, desperately using every means at hand to turn the assault. Their bravery delayed the battle far longer than Keinin had thought possible, but even their valor could not withstand the bloody attack forever. For as Harvey fired the last shot from his revolver, Jane's rifle having been emptied minutes earlier, he flung the weapon at the head of an encroaching snake-man, and both he and Basuli fell victim to the steady gush of venom issuing from the mouths of their assailants. An instant later, Jane was surrounded by the monstrous men. Bound tightly by the coils of one of the larger

of the snake-men, the one who seemed to be their leader approached the terrified woman and, staring deeply into her eyes, his own red-rimmed orbs powerfully hypnotized her. As he found her falling within his will, he hissed sibilant instructions to the snake-man wrapped about her. The huge, rippling coils of his body unwound themselves, and Jane Clayton, wife of Tarzan, stood submissively before the snake-men, slave to their wishes.

"Come, Mr. Harvey, Mr. Keinin, and Mr. Sortie. We are to go with these strange people, to their land. No, Basuli, you are to stay here. Do not worry," she patted the head of the agonized Waziri, with a strange tenderness, "it is what we must do. You shall regain your sight within a few hours, and the pain will grow less and less as the time passes. I go to meet Tarzan. He awaits me in the land of my masters."

Bill Harvey listened to her soft voice with sad amazement, realizing, despite his own agony, that she knew not what she was saying. The Belgian and the German listened to her with rejoicing in their hearts. It had worked. She was in their power, and she would be their instrument for keeping the American with them.

The oddly assorted group moved across the bloody campsite and disappeared into the dark jungle beyond. As the moon shone brightly down upon the clearing, it revealed the huge body of Basuli who lay, flat on his back, blind eyes staring with suffering after the unseen group. Finally, he raised himself painfully upon his hands and knees and crawled slowly toward the trees at the far side of the clearing. Again and again he sank weakly to the bloody ground, but each time he rose again and continued his pitiable way toward the only safety he could imagine in this vale of terror. After what seemed to him a night without end, he reached the first tree. The great warrior somehow raised himself to its lower terrace, then, with inhuman strength, onward and upward to the greater safety of the middle terrace.

All night Basuli lay there, falling from time to time into a fretful, uneasy sleep, then painfully awakening to the ugly present. He did not see the two snake-men who returned to the clearing for the purpose of killing him. Nerag, the leader of the snake-men, had learned from the Belgian that his hypnotic powers could be used effectively only when he did not attempt to force a victim into an action repellent to himself. Knowing that Lady Greystoke could never bring herself to the murder of a protector, nor to allowing anyone to harm such a faithful warrior as Basuli had been, Nerag had implanted into her brain the thought that her going peacefully with his men was a means of saving the life of Basuli. Nerag had been less than a mile from the campsite when he had dropped back and sent two of his men to return to the scene of the battle and kill the last remaining witness. So it was that Basuli's earlier valor served to save his life. For those added minutes of battle given by the American and the noble Waziri had been of far more importance than either had realized. The snake-men had a long journey before them. A journey they must make before the sun rose. If they failed to get back to their own well-protected land during the night, they would become immobilized, and the day people of Lyta could easily undo all they had done. It was for this reason that the two snake-men failed to seek the missing Basuli and finish him off. They spoke of looking for him, but both agreed it was best to lie to their leader Nerag, to claim to have carried out his orders, rather than to risk being caught by the rising sun and the vengeful snake-men of the day. Also, the Belgian had taught his lessons well. Neither of the snake-men gave much credit to the mentality or bravery of the Waziri.

They wasted not a minute in search of Basuli, but once having agreed upon their story for Nerag, raced silently away, in a fear-inspired attempt to reach their fellow people.

In the middle terrace, Basuli heard them not. Blind and hurting though he still remained, Basuli had but one thought. Revenge! Revenge for Tarzan. Revenge for Jane. And revenge for the nobility of the Waziri warriors lying dead in the clearing below!

CHAPTER IX

The Secret Chambers of Narda

Goro, the moon, was still high in the heavens when Tarzan of the Apes awakened, eyes still burning from the poisonous venom, but his magnificent sight restored. Unlike Basuli, the ape-man would not have to suffer hours of blindness. His blood and his recuperative powers were far beyond the ken of the ordinary man.

The cavern in which he found himself was similar in size and shape to the home of Lyta; however, its furnishings were far more luxurious, and there, were no smoking fires of protection throughout the room nor at the entrance.

"You are awake, Tarzan. You are indeed a man of much strength. For when one of your race has been felled by the venom of a snake-man, he is usually powerless for many hours—for that matter, some of your people can never recover."

Tarzan turned his bronzed body toward the voice. The cavern was illuminated by strange mounds of glowing dirt-like substances. In the eerie light, Tarzan saw Narda, the night priestess, standing proud and erect across the room from him. She was, in her own way, as stunningly beautiful as her sister, Lyta. The same full, rounded body; the same jutting bosom, incredibly slim waist, and long, shapely legs. Her coloring was, however, vastly different—as different from that of Lyta as day is from night. For whereas Lyta had exuded a blondness from head to toe, Narda's hair was of a blue-black, and her skin of an olive ripeness. Her eyes, the same strange-lidded and shaped eyes as Lyta's were, instead of the pale blue of her sister, a deep, almost black shade of green. There was about Narda, and for that matter, about her quarters as well, an air of corruptness, even of evil unguessed at.

"Where," the ape-man spoke as he pulled himself up to a sitting position, "is your Belgian? I must speak to this evil man. I must stop this violent war between sisters. You, I assume are Narda, the *beloved* sister of Lyta?"

The pure evilness of her laughter gave Tarzan pause for thought. This indeed, he told himself, was a woman corrupted. "You will see *my* Belgian, when I am ready for you to see him, Tarzan. Not before. You are not master here, O lord of the jungle. You are my slave!"

"Tarzan is slave to no man—nor woman!" The deep voice of the man should have warned Narda. It should have told her that this captive of hers was not of the same weak ilk as her Belgian lover, and not to be toyed with as any of her snake-men could be during their brief lives as men-shaped men. She had not enough experience, however, with true men to read the warning.

This time her answering laughter was bitter rather than evil. All had not been happiness between Narda and her Belgian lover. She had learned early in their evil relationship that men of the tarmangani tribes were not as those of her snake-men. Yet, somehow, the stories she had so long heard of this man called Tarzan had inflamed her heart with a great desire to know him, to know him fully, to know a true man instead of the false, greedy white man she had been fool enough to link herself with. Despite the corrupt practices Keinin had taught Narda, there remained within her brain and her heart the memories of

better days. Perhaps, the idea flickered tantalizingly through her mind, Tarzan of the Apes might help her find her way back to those days. Perhaps they could rid her people of the yoke of the Belgian and find happiness together.

Narda looked down upon Tarzan, sitting there so calmly, so filled with strength, and tears rose to her eyes so that she had to turn her face from him that he should not see this sign of weakness. He would, she decided at that moment, either join forces with her or she should torture and kill this man.

Speaking not to him, she began to pace back and forth across her chambers, as the ape-man remained sitting stoically upon the floor near her. He knew that he had no hope of escape until the night ended. While none of Narda's snake-men were in the chamber to guard her, Tarzan did not doubt the presence of a veritable army of them just outside her door, ready to pour in at the first sign of danger to their priestess. And while he feared no man, and few beasts, the ape-man was aware that even he could not hope to defeat a small army of huge snakes, armed not only with their poisonous venom, but with the brains of men to assist in their use of the snake bodies. He had no hope of help from Lyta and her tribe, not until the sun rose at any rate. Perhaps it would be impossible even then for Lyta's men to help him. Surely Narda would not have brought him here if she did not feel she had made sufficient plans to retain him during the dangerous hours of the sun. Still, as he watched Narda pace to and fro, the ape-man smiled at her nervousness. Despite her seeming concentration upon other subjects, Narda caught a glimpse of this smile from the corner of her green slanting eyes. She glared at her captive, and muttered something beneath her breath, but she did not spit her venom upon him, nor did she call for any of her snake-men. "I shall hide him deep in the secret chambers, before the devil sun arises," she said to herself, "If he will not join with me, tomorrow night my people shall be given his body for their pleasures." She looked down again upon his incredibly perfect male body, and upon his masculinely beautiful face. She steeled herself against his possible rejection, although, deep within herself, Narda knew that she had lost this god-like man before she'd ever claimed him. At the thought of this insult, she moved directly across the room to the ape-man, and taking a long, thin steel blade from the metallic girdle that encircled her slender hips placed its point against his throat.

Tarzan looked into her eyes and laughed out loud. He came dangerously close to forcing her hand, but as the quick anger surged into her heart, her slumberous eyes saw once again the beauty of the man before her. How perfect that bronzed body. She compared it mentally with her snake-men, even with the bodies they assumed during the mating periods, and she shuddered at the comparison. She placed the knife back into its sheath at her girdle, and moved away from this wondrous person. Once again, Narda began to pace her chambers.

Outside, the darkness of the jungle night began to fade, and the first dim lights of the forthcoming dawn began to pale the skies. Into the chambers of Narda came the sound of a voice, the voice of one of her guards. While Tarzan could not understand the language of the Snake People as they talked among themselves, from the expressions which flitted across Narda's face as she answered, questioned and answered again, he knew something had gone wrong with her plans for this night.

"It is coming close to daybreak, Priestess Narda, and our men have not yet returned with the mate of Tarzan. What shall we do about them "

"Have they been spotted by our cliff-top sentries, O Namon?" Narda asked by way of reply.

"They cannot be seen, Priestess. And while you spoke with our prisoner, Tarzan, three of the lower guards went forth into the jungle, in search of them. If they do not arrive almost immediately, they will be lost to the men of Lyta!"

"The lower guards are not still out there?" Narda spoke angrily. "And why was I not advised they were leaving our fortress "

"I tried only to help you, Priestess," the snake-man's voice took on a tinge of fear. Narda was 'a strong woman, a leader who did not appreciate her people taking any of her responsibilities away from her.

"All right, Namon. All right. But send none of my people out again without my permission. We have lost many brave snake-men during this war. And it is still another moon before we may mate to replenish our tribe." She fell silent, but her pacing continued in an even more agitated fashion. "Send one of your men to the clifftop guards. He is to return to me at once if they have news. It is not for the mate of Tarzan that I fear. If Keinin has her, he can get her here, even though the sun does rise. But our people will be at the mercy of the day snakes. And Lyta will not fail to take full advantage of that! Now, stand guard faithfully. I take Tarzan to the secret chamber, that he will be safely our prisoner throughout your somnolent hours!"

To Tarzan, any moment of life was a chance to prolong his living. Therefore he did not argue with Narda as she hissed her instructions that he follow. He had listened most carefully to the priestess of the day people. He knew full well that Narda was new to this fortress, and that because of her limitations it could well be the so-called secret chamber could turn into an escape route of unbelievable ease. It could also not be the case, but at this point any chance was better than that which showed its face.

As the lithe and tawny Tarzan and the sleek seductress moved rapidly through the passageway toward her secret chambers, neither spoke. Narda, aware as she might be of the man behind her, was tremendously worried about the snake-men the Belgian had borrowed from her for his great plan. Tarzan, in turn, was alertly watching every turn and angle of the long, winding way, in search of a means of escape. Their swift, silent movements lent added mystery to the scene.

Finally the two arrived at a strange, tortuous turn which led into an equally strange room. As the ape-man looked about it became immediately obvious to him he was in an ancient temple, built by a people long forgotten. That Narda had been here before was quite obvious because of the strange, earth-like heaps of illumination. His pulse quickened as he sniffed the fresh air pouring into the temple from some obscure opening. He glanced at Narda, who seemed oblivious of this harbinger for escape. She was right—in her own way. But she, as had so many others before her, had failed to realize the fantastic strength and capabilities of this man. To her, the hypnotic gaze she thrust upon her captive, and the jet of venom she burst into his eyes, were more than enough to keep him immobile during the day hours to come. The dark woman did not, could not, know that a man of Tarzan's nature would never succumb to her hypnotic powers. She should have realized, having just been witness to his incredible recovery from the venomous assault by her snake-men that he would not long be powerless. But her reasoning was faulty. And so she left the ape-man, seemingly her captive. It was to be under vastly different circumstances that she would face him once more!

The Journey from the desecrated campsite through the night jungle and back to the Valley of the Volcanos was a nightmare to all but its participants excepting Jane. In dazed trance she alone among the group failed to note the wild jungle hatred surrounding them. It was as though every beast in the land knew that the hated Snake People had taken, first Tarzan of the Apes, and now his mate. Gone was the eerie silence the presence of the snake-men usually enforced. The screams of the big cats echoed about the captives and their captors; screams of frustrated anger and hatred. The snake-men drew their forces closer and tighter as time and again one of their number was attacked by Simba and his sons. It was an

uneven battle, as the monstrosly strong snake-men had their humanoid brains and their maddening poisonous venom with which to protect themselves, as well as the crushing power of their great coiled bodies. Still, the cats did not stop their harassment of the party, audit became increasingly evident to both Nerag, the leader, and Keinin, the Belgian, that if these assaults continued they could result in such loss of precious night hours as to defeat completely the successful culmination of the kidnapping plan. So it was that Keinin and Nerag moved to one side of the group, and together agreed to send out a certain number of the snake-men to meet the cats in pitched battle. These men were to be considered expendable for the good of the majority. Pierre Sortie, watching the two from his position safely within the ranks of the snake-men, wished fervently that he had never joined forces with the wily Belgian. Even the thought of the millions of ill-gotten dollars he might some day receive failed to dim the nightmarish quality of this march, and the terrifying fears that held his mind and body in bondage. Bill Harvey, who had received the most powerful of the poisonous jets was still unable to see, and was being led gently along the path by the hand of Jane, who whispered comforting words and encouragement to her good and true friend. As the chattering of the monkeys, the guttural sounds of many Jungle beasts and the screams of the cats continued unabated, the party wended its way constantly toward the safety of Narda's fortress. As they neared the volcanic lake past which Tarzan had walked the previous day, the first pale rays of the dawn began to lighten the night skies. Angered though the beasts of Tarzan's jungle had been, they dared not follow the group into this entrance to their lair. Across the strange clearing, the night snake-people could see the red-rimmed eyes of their former brothers, waiting sullenly for that first ray of sunshine which would release their angry powers and entrap the night-men to their mercy.

Nerag approached Keinin swiftly. "Not all of us are going to make it back safely," he told the evil Belgian. "There are but a few minutes of movement left to us. I have advised the forward marchers to race toward our fortress at their full speed, leaving you and the prisoners to your own pace."

"You can't do that, Nerag. It is cowardly, and it will arouse the wrath of Narda, your priestess!"

The snake-man flared his ugly nostrils at the Belgian. "When Narda learns how many we have lost this night, to further your plans, Keinin, her wrath may well turn against you! I have already given my instructions to the forward guard. And my son is instructing those behind us, those who have no chance at all to get back before the devil sun paralyses them, to seek whatever shelter they can find. Lyta's forces will show us no mercy, but I shall not have my brave people decimated further—not if I can stop it. At least a few of them may find a swale in which they will remain undiscovered until the cloud of night frees them once again."

"But what shall I . . ."

"You are not stopped by our enemy the sun. You have told our beloved Narda that your brain and your foreign ways know many ways of protection and warfare of which we are ignorant. You have but a short distance to safety. If you spoke the truth, surely you can outwit Lyta's forces. They do not regain their full powers at once. It takes a little time, as it does for us when nighttime falls. I leave you now, for I too will try to get back to Narda. She needs me now, more than ever!"

With these words, the huge snake-man propelled his body across the clearing at a fantastic speed, rapidly cutting the distance between himself and the fast-moving troops ahead of him. Looking back, Keinin was amazed to see the empty clearing behind him. Not one of the many snake-men who had been there when he first spoke with Nerag remained within sight. Pierre Sortie, bewildered, and still all but overcome by the horrible events of the night, sobbed in terror to Keinin: "They've deserted us. What is to become of us now "

The Belgian slapped him sharply across his face. "I know how to get back. I'll lead, but we must

hurry. Any moment now, the snake-men of Lyta will be free to assault us. If they succeed, all of our plans are for naught. We will never get away from them alive!" He moved sharply away from the hysterical German, and reaching Jane and the wounded Bill Harvey, bade them hurry. As they passed the bubbling lake, the first rays of the sun hit the lava, and a million sparkling reflections lit up the clearing.

CHAPTER X

Escape by Dawn

For some time Tarzan lay as Narda had left him, seemingly as one under her hypnotic spell and blinded by her venom. But he was neither. At length he stirred. His eyes swept about the dimly lit room as he rose slowly to a sitting position—listening. No other ears could have caught the faint bubbling sound which reached Tarzan. Narda had spent much time in this secret cavern of hers, and had never heard it. Going back mentally over the events of the previous hours, the ape-man decided the cavern was deep down within the cliff, and very near the volcanic lake he had discovered just before he encountered Lyta. The fresh air seemed to swirl about him, and Tarzan knew there must be a means of escape from this prison. It remained only for him to find it. Reaching to his loincloth he discovered gratefully that Narda and her people had not taken his sharp hunting knife. He would need another weapon, though, and Tarzan began to search about the ancient temple, seeking some artifact that would serve the purpose. In a far corner was a kind of altar, against which leaned four long and heavy spear-like decorations. Molded as they seemed to be, still Tarzan spotted the weakest portion of the structure. Heavy muscles straining, the huge man broke the nearest decoration from its altared base. As he stood there, hefting the weight of the strange object, determining its usefulness to him, a sudden blast of cold air hit him directly about his sinewy thighs. Kneeling to seek its source, he discovered that in wresting the spear-like object from the altar, he had opened along-unused secret doorway from the side of the altar. Peering into the recess he could see the beginning of a flight of stone steps, leading downward. The bubbling sound of the lake was much more evident. Walking over to one of the piles of earth-like light, Tarzan picked up a handful of the stuff. It was oddly warm to his touch, and its light flowed forth undiminished by separation from the greater mass. Back to the altar strode Tarzan of the Apes, and down through the small doorway he crawled. He then straightened up and walked, almost incautiously, down the stone steps. He moved so rapidly that when he reached a sudden turn in the staircase, he was unable to halt himself in preparation for whatever might be around this corner. So it was that the slippery floor of the water-covered passageway served to delay the ape-man another precious hour, for as his feet hit the moss-covered stone they went out from under him, and in falling he hit his head a glancing blow against the rock walls of the tunnel. In his somewhat weakened position, he lost his consciousness for some time, and when he came to once again, it was to the sight of the bright sun reflecting a glaring light from the rippling waters in the cave. Looking upward, Tarzan could see an orifice far above his head. A thought it was the only evident opening to the place, the flow of the water about his feet and the strong gusts of air which cooled the tunnel gave Tarzan reason to believe his quickest escape would be reached by going downward rather than attempting to reach the visible orifice. For a long distance the passage continued straight as an arrow. The waters seemed never to rise, but remained ankle-deep, just enough to make footing difficult and progress slow. Rounding the first turn of a mile or so, this time Tarzan moved with great caution. From here on, the bright sun was lost, and the gloom of the passageway was relieved only by the substance Tarzan carried in his right hand. The tunnel now became a circuitous passage, turning back and forth, left and right, many times; at last it seemed to end in a small, circular chamber, at one curve of which a faint light could be seen glowing. Tarzan crossed the room, and an exclamation of relieved delight broke from his lips at the sight of the blue and sunlit skies around the bend. As he

reached the egress, he stood cautiously, looking out at the Valley of the Volcanos. That he was now safe from the snake-men of Narda, Tarzan knew. How Lyta might react to the knowledge of his freedom he could not be sure. Certainly, hoping still that he might in some way help her, she would not, for the present, harm Kamjei. And Tarzan of the Apes was as wise as he was strong. To attempt to defeat the men of Narda was an impossibility for one man. It was best, he decided, to return to his compound, there to map out a battle plan with his Waziri, from there to the forest of the great apes to enjoin their aid. Then—and only then, a return to the land of the Snake People. As Tarzan moved stealthily across the clearing, past the volcanic lake, and toward the jungle on the other side, he was not aware of the fact that his fall back in the tunnel had actually insured his escape. Had he arrived at this spot one hour earlier he would have found it swarming with Lyta's forces. As it was, they had gone into the jungle in search of their former brothers, and having found and killed all that had been trapped by the sun, had returned to the cliffside fortress to meet with their priestess, Lyta. Nor was Tarzan aware that his beloved Jane was at this very moment in the chambers of Narda, evil priestess of his foe. The presence of the swarms of day-snakes had obliterated her scent, as well as the scent of the Europeans—either of which would have been enough to turn the ape-man back toward his recently vacated prison.

Reaching the jungle, Tarzan swung rapidly through the lower and middle terraces, to the upper terrace of lesser boughs and swifter movements. He had been traveling in this fashion for an hour or longer when Tarzan recognized the hunger' pangs which attacked his flat stomach. It was only then that the ape-man recalled he had eaten nothing since early the previous day. Hurried though he might be to return to Jane and the compound, still his jungle training told him that a hungered man is a weakened man. He must stop long enough to track down and kill a meal for himself, so that he would be in fighting shape for any dangers which might lie ahead of him. Seldom did the ape-man ever go hungry within this jungle he knew so well. It was rich in game animals, birds and fish, as well as in the fruits, grubs, and the countless other forms of vegetable and animal life upon which this jungle-raised man could eat heartily.

Moving swiftly from the upper terrace down through the middle and finally to the lower, where he could track and kill his quarry, the bronzed man became once again a beast of his own beloved jungle.

Within but a few minutes of searching, Tarzan had spotted the trail of Bara, the deer. It was at a water hole near a small, tree-covered clearing that Bara fell easy victim to Tarzan's hunger. This was just before noon. As the ape-man fed, he was also aware of the voices of the great four-footed hunters which rose now and again from each and every direction. Knowing his jungle friends as well as his jungle enemies, and knowing their hunger most of all, Tarzan took the route of discretion—he shouldered the carcass of Bara, the deer, and walked lithely across the clearing, toward the great trees which he knew so well. As he reached the edge of this feeding spot, the sounds of the jungle seemed to well about him. Swinging lightly toward the tree which best suited him, Tarzan found a seat among the branches which served as both chair, table, and a SDO for true reconnaissance. He was comfortable. He ate comfortably.

The flesh of Bara was delicious to the hungry master of the wilds. When he became close to satiated, he carried the remainder of her carcass to the other side of his protective tree, and there he deposited it—far above the ground—most secure. Tarzan would be passing through these wilds once more, en route to ending the reign of the Snake People. At that time Tarzan might not have such luck at hunting. As he placed the carcass carefully in the tree, the roars of the lions and the screams of the other cats seemed to swell with in creasing animosity. Tarzan, with majestic disdain, ignored the sounds. But, suddenly, his sensitive hearing spotted a new sound amid the madness beneath him. As the noon sun grew high above the jungle, Tarzan heard this sound, and the sudden rush of feet across the grassy carpet in the vicinity of his tree. He was at once alert and ready for any strange jungle activity. He was far more alert than you or I might have been, given similar circumstances. He was, after all, a creature of the wild, and his eyes, glaring down upon the clearing, were clear and bright, so vividly clear and bright that they

must have registered vivid and clear impressions upon his great brain.

His eyes widened even further as they focused upon the scene beneath him. For there, racing toward the very tree in which he crouched was Lyta, the Priestess of Day—the strange woman who had, merely a few hours previously, told him she could not leave the protection of her snake-men. Behind her terrified figure, in such close pursuit as to deny the possibility of his quarry escaping, came Numa. A Numa enraged, a gigantic Numa, a Numa in full charge!

So enraged was the beast that no sound issued from his mouth. So terrified the priestess that no call for help came from her lovely lips. They were as two bound spirits—one the spirit of death—the other, of hope. They moved in swift silence toward the tree of Tarzan, a tragedy inherent within both bestial and human bodies.

As his eyes widened, and he took in the scene being enacted beneath him, Tarzan was already preparing for his action. His keen brain spotted the dangers, his warm heart told him the necessities. Rapidly, thought upon thought became action upon action. Tarzan was in mid-air as Numa started his final leap toward capture of this elusive prize!

So close, as a matter of fact, was the tawny Numa that Tarzan was given little or no time in which to carefully choose his method of attack. He leaped as a diver leaps, from the springboard straight into the waters beneath himself. But the waters were, for Tarzan, the body of Numa, his long-time enemy. As he dove toward the beast he held, naked in his hand, the blade of his father; the blood-colored blade of many deaths! In his tree nest remained the artifact from the Valley of Volcanos—the spear-like object that might have proved more helpful to him.

Tarzan of the Apes was once again an animal—the greatest of all jungle beasts. He needed not to defend himself with man-made objects. As he fell upon Numa, a raking talon caught the ape-man upon one side. It inflicted a long, deep wound, and over and above the sounds of the glade-lit battle, once again Tarzan heard the wailing of Lyta. Subconsciously, he glanced toward the lower terrace, to make sure the quarry of his foe had escaped. She sat upon a lower branch, pristine in her glory, but her terror reflected horribly upon her lovely face. As a second talon scraped his taut muscles, the great tarmangani turned his entire enmity toward Numa. The screams of the yellow and tawny beast as the knife of Tarzan found its target seemed to fill the Jungle. Again and again the ape-man raised the knife and again and again it found the mark. Still Numa fought. Still Numa screamed. And still Numa's talons found the bronzed body of this, his most frightful enemy.

Finally, a single and terrific blow upon the golden bead of the beast was the undoing of Numa. Coupled with the blow was the last strike of Tarzan's knife, which found the wild heart, and after a few convulsive shudders, gave it peace. The death of Numa was marked by a sudden relaxation, and a silence comparable to that brought about by the Snake People.

Leaping to his feet, Tarzan raised his eyes quickly toward Lyta, then, turning them away, he placed his foot upon the carcass of Numa—and as though to reclaim his rightful role as king of this jungle, gave forth the hideous victory cry of the bull apes. The great man knew this was used mainly to brag to Goro, but Tarzan knew the many miles he must travel to reach his ape friends. The sight of Lyta, fleeing though the day was progressing, fleeing without her beloved snake-men, had given his keen mind thoughts of much trouble. He thought, as he uttered the hideous screitM, I shall have not time to call upon my friends. They must come to me! And, as the horrible scream burst forth from his lips, Tarzan returned his knife, bloody from Numa, to his loincloth, and, swiftly returned to the branch upon which Lyta quietly waited.

For a moment, the two quietly appraised each other. It was Lyta who broke the silence.

"You have greatly angered Narda, Tarzan of the Apes."

"Oh? So the estranged sisters are together again now?"

"But no. What makes you say such a thing?"

"I have been gone from Narda's 'secret chambers' a very short time, comparatively speaking. You, Lyta, move swiftly in this Jungle to which you are so strange. Yet you know of my escape, and you tell me of her anger. What else must I assume than that you and the woman of the night are once again working together?"

Lyta permitted herself a small grimace at the ape-man's expense. "You know much, Tarmangani, but you obviously did not learn one of the first secrets of the Valley of the Volcanos! I had thought surely it would be immediately evident to you."

"Continue, Lyta." Tarzan ignored her grimace and overlooked the implication of doubt in her words and voice.

"The acoustics in that accursed place are all but unbelievable. With a certain wind, and even without it, at certain times of the day and night even the slightest of whispers becomes a shout and is echoed over and over again. Both Narda and I have chosen our particular chambers for the location least open to such maddening peculiarities. But even they do not give full protection from the demon of the valley."

"What has all of this to do with my escape—or with the anger of Narda, your sister?"

"Her Belgian returned to her this morning. Somehow, he passed through my men without notice. He must have made the attempt just as the dawn arose, when their powers are not yet fully their own. The two *lovers*," and now the voice of Lyta became laced with bitterness and hatred, "began quarreling within moments of his return, and their eagerly awaited reunion! He cursed her for letting you escape from their fortress, and she cursed him for leaving so many of the people to the whims of my army! Well she might have. We destroyed a large group of them within the hour."

"You told me you never separated yourself from your people. Why then, Lyta, have you come after me alone this day?" His steely grey eyes peered with deep penetration into her pale blue orbs. To his surprise and amazement tears welled to the surface and the voice of the snake priestess was choked as she gave her reply.

"I also had told you of the many great things I have known of you, Tarzan of the Apes, and the reason I had decided to ask for your help. You will recall I warned you not to go out into the evil night. I had told you that your runner Kamjei was well and safe. You did not choose to believe me. Now, I hope you will have learned that I speak only the truth. For now, Tarzan, you must believe me!"

A strange sensation of almost unknown fear began to creep through the body of the handsome man. Somehow, he knew full well that Lyta would speak the truth, and somehow he knew the truth would be fraught with horror for him. "Speak up, Lyta. What is it that I must believe from you?"

"Narda and her Belgian have your mate, Jane. She is their captive, and they intend to use her to recapture you and to kill me and all of my people!"

Jane! In the midst of those ghastly snake-men! At the mercy of the evil Narda and the corrupt Belgian. It was the first inclination of Tarzan to swing back into the upper terrace, race back through the jungles to the Valley of the Volcanos, and to invade, singlehandedly, that horrid den of vileness. His own good judgement and courage came to his rescue almost immediately. If he had not been able to cope with the snake-men of Narda when only his personal safety was at stake, how could he hope to do so when the great love of his life was involved? He must carry out his original plan. He must return to the compound and prepare a strategy of war, and seek the help of his many Jungle friends. Without asking, he knew that Lyta and her people would Join with him in this fight.

"How long can you remain away from your men, Lyta?" He asked the question rapidly.

"I should return to them before the sun goes down. They become helpless then, and if I am not there to protect them Narda will surely destroy the entire fortress."

"Then you must return now."

"You are not coming back with me?" The amazement in the voice of the priestess was deep.

"I am not coming back with you now, Lyta," and the ape-man looked down at the lovely woman with warm understanding, "but you must not fear nor lose hope. For Tarzan of the Apes will help your people. I will return to the Valley of the Volcanos. I will take my woman from the vile clutches of those two and their misbegotten followers. But I cannot do it alone. I go now to my fortress to gather together my army. It may take a few hours more than you can spare, Lyta, but return to your home with full heart. For Tarzan is with you in this time of trouble. And Tarzan of the Apes will fight and win your battle for you!"

As he spoke, he turned, waved a quick farewell to the slim priestess and disappeared as if by magic into the trees above.

CHAPTER XI

The Note of Ransom

The quarrel which had given Lyta the information as to Tarzan's escape and the capture of Jane Clayton raged continuously throughout the morning. Not only was Narda enraged and heartsick because of the loss of so many of her valued warriors, she was also, unknown to Leopold Kein, utterly furious that she had lost her chance to capture the handsome ape-man. Add to these two good reasons for her anger the immediate feminine instinct which had told her that the wife of Tarzan, this Jane Clayton who stood so proudly, albeit under hypnotic influence, before her, was as lovely and seductive as Narda herself, and her rage was within reason.

Before giving way to the stream of invectives with which she was to abuse the unfortunate Belgian for hours, Narda had led Jane and Bill Harvey to one of her secret chambers, supposedly, in front of them, planning to install Kein and the sill-terrified Pierre Sortie in another. Actually, as the quarrel continued unabated, the German began to wish he had indeed been incarcerated!

"Three hundred! Three hundred of my finest men lost to you and your fanatical ideas! How many more will go next? You know full well, Keinin, that there is no hope of replenishing our forces until the next full moon. At the rate you are going, *kind sir* " and the curtsy of respect she gave to match her words was a gesture of utter scorn, "there will be none of my people left to father another army for you!"

"Narda, Narda," the weary Belgian tried once again to interject, as he had so frequently and unsuccessfully in the past hours, "if you will only listen to me!"

The wildly furious woman spun about on her dainty arched feet. "All right, Keinin. I'll listen. But you had better have something important to say, and something sensible to say ! Or so help me, I'll give my remaining troops a feast this night!"

"My very beautiful lady, if you will stop screaming and start thinking, you will have to realize that three hundred of our people is but a minor loss when compared to the advantage we have won with the capture of Tarzan's mate. Now, now Narda . . ." and he raised a calming hand to quiet her heated reaction to his term of a "minor loss." "My heart, too, is heavy that those valiant fighters of the night did not come back. But is it not best that we lose them now, rather than lose perhaps thousands more through a long and costly civil war? With Jane in our possession, Tarzan cannot refuse to help us in wiping out the deadly troops of Lyta, the Evil! And with Tarzan and his jungle friends to help us, Lyta is doomed. Think of it, Narda." The wily Belgian moved toward the woman, to caress her shoulder briefly as he continued to speak. "No longer will you have to remain on guard every night, lonely before Goro the Moon, helpless without your men and fearful of what the morning might bring from your sworn enemies. No longer, Narda, will you have to stay in this small chamber during the sunlit hours. You and I, your people safe and at rest, may go forth into the world. We may swim in the sunshine, walk in the fresh, warm daylight hours, and Narda . . ." his point had been made, as he pressed his fully fleshed lips against her curved shoulder, "we, you and I, may enjoy one another's company without fear or hesitation."

Keinin had been away too long. Narda knew he was wrong, knew she should remain angered, knew even she should carry out her threat of feeding him to her army. But Narda was a lonely woman.

Narda nodded, and kissed him passionately. Unnoticed, in the corner of the room, Pierre Sortie breathed a great sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, in their prison chamber, Jane and Bill Harvey talked quietly—with the quiet of desperation—trying to find a means of escape. Jane had recovered from the hypnotic spell of the great snakes almost as soon as they were left alone. As Bill Harvey filled her in on the horrors of the long night march, and the desperate race for the fortress as dawn broke over them, Jane was thankful that she had been unaware of such happenings. "Truly," she said to Bill, "I do not think I could have come through such an experience with my sanity. You are a very brave man, and a true friend to have stayed by my side. My husband will be most grateful, as am I."

"If he doesn't decide to kill me first," muttered the abashed American.

"Why, whatever in the world makes you say such a thing as that?" the gentle woman questioned in amazement.

"I am almost certain—no, I am positive that Keinin and Sortie were somehow in on that bloody mess. They lied to me, and in turn, I lied to you. It became evident to me last night during the heat of the battle. They were not actually fighting against those demons. They were all but fighting with them. And you will recall-- no," the earnest young man shook his head in despair, "you were under that beastly spell,

so you cannot remember. But they were not injured nearly as Basuli and I were by the poison venom those snake-men used to defeat us. Both of them fell to the ground screaming, but neither were strongly hit. Several times during the trek I saw Keinin at one side, talking to the leader of that vile group. And this morning, the mad dash to reach this place was led by Keinin and Keinin alone. The snakes had all disappeared. We could have gotten away, but Keinin confused you and told me we must get to safety. So, my dear Lady Greystoke, it is as I said. Tarzan may be grateful to me, if he doesn't kill me first!"

Jane took his hand gently within her own. "My husband is a fair man, Mr. Harvey. It is not your fault these evil men plotted against us, lying to you as well as to me and my Waziri. But John will be grateful that when you discovered the truth, you stood beside me to protect me rather than merely running away to save yourself. Do not fear harm from Tarzan. He will be grateful. Now, we must look for a means of escape. Why, what is that?" For the first time, Jane Clayton noticed the strange, light-giving dirt piled in heaps about the room. So worried had he been, Bill Harvey had not noticed it either. Walking rapidly across the room, he knelt beside one of the piles, and with amazement picked a bit of the earth, warm to his touch, from the mass of light. "Good Lord," he all but whistled beneath his breath, "It's the answer to the whole thing. No wonder Keinin tied up with these beasts, if they have access to much of this."

Jane moved to join the man, following his conversation with bewilderment. "What do you mean, Mr. Harvey? What is the answer to the whole thing?"

"This is practically pure radium, Lady Greystofce. Why, the Curies had to sift through tons and tons of pitchblende to come up with one tiny bit of the stuff! In this room alone, there must be a fortune in it! I can even find it within my heart now to feel sorry for these Snake People. Keinin and Sortie are quite obviously using them. When they get enough of this packed up, they'll either kill them or leave them to the gentle mercies of a maddened jungle

"As he spoke, a faint echo sounded throughout the cave-like room. Jane's eyes gladdened as she heard it. It was the cry of the bull ape. Tarzan would help them.

In the chambers of Narda the priestess, the echo and sound were much more distinct. The reaction was quite different. Far from happiness, Narda knew fear. Despite his outward confidence, Keinin also was frightened. The legends of the ape-men were many. The Belgian now prayed that the stories of his love for his mate had been true. If not, if Tarzan warred against them instead of joining with them against Lyta, he and Sortie were as good as dead already. And the fortune practically within their fingertips would be lost before it was won. His twisted mind working rapidly, Keinin made a decision which once again angered Narda. "Where are the captives? I must talk to the woman at once. Alone!"

"If you wish to talk to the woman, you may. But you may not be alone with her!"

"Narda— "

"Silence! I have spoken. Shall I bring her here, or do you prefer to attempt to find her yourself?"

"All right, Narda. Bring her here. But I do not understand your demands in this matter."

"That is not important. I shall be back shortly. Do not try to follow me, or you will find yourself imprisoned in a hopeless mass of endless tunnels," As she spoke, the priestess slipped out of the entrance to her chambers and disappeared from sight. The Belgian, still frightened, obeyed her last orders.

It was almost twenty minutes before the two women arrived back upon the scene. Jane stood as

proud and fearless as her captor, and looked down with scorn at the two villains before her.

"You do not seem surprised, Lady Greystoke, to see Sortie and myself at home in these strange rooms?"

"Among *civilized* persons, Mr. Keinin, if you could ever understand, it is traditional to greet a guest with welcome and a believing heart. I did so to you. It is also traditional to offer help when help is needed. This, too, I did for you. It is *not*, however, traditional to remain a fool with eyes closed to the truth, when that truth has become self-evident. No, I am not surprised to see you at home in these strange rooms. Nor am I a fool. Even in the hypnotic trance into which your evil friends placed me, I saw evidence of your treachery."

Keinin placed a restraining arm upon Narda as she reacted violently to Janets description of her people. "Quite a speech for a prisoner, Mrs. Clayton."

"Lady Greystoke, if you please, *Mister* Keinin!" Jane's eyes flashed with true disdain and anger. "And you may be sure I shall not long remain your prisoner!"

"That's just what we brought you up here to discuss." The yellowed teeth of the man shone dully as he smiled. "As you know, most kidnappers commit the crime for a ransom . . . for money. We need no money; our ransom is something quite different. The help of your husband."

"He will never pay it." Jane paled beneath the flush of anger which had colored her face since she confronted the two betrayers of her trust. She wished now only to return to the prison she shared with Bill Harvey and plan their immediate escape. Tarzan must not fall prey to these evil men, not even for her safety.

"We just happen to think he will. It's well known what you mean to him. It's doubtful, for instance, that he would like the idea of your being given to my good friend, Mr. Sortie, or to our friends the snake-men!"

Jane remained silent in the face of this vile threat. "I want you to write a little note to him . . . oh, no . . ." and the Belgian raised a hand to stall off the expected refusal. "I'm not asking that you ask him to help us. I merely want you to let him know that you are alive, unharmed, and—so far—well treated."

Jane shook her head by way of refusal, but again, she did not speak. Narda, still angered by the woman's description of her men, turned to Leopold. "She will not be so brave, nor so silent once the sun goes down. I'll have NERAG and his men take care of that for us!"

"No, no, Narda. It is not necessary. Lady Greystoke will cooperate with us." The Belgian put the full force of his baleful gaze upon Jane. "I am sure she would prefer to write a short, happy note to send to her husband, rather than have Pierre remove her clothing, as evidence she; is indeed within our hands."

Even the lustful German paled at the thought of this dishonor to the wife of Tarzan. Keinin stepped across the cavern toward Jane and placed a vein-lined hand upon her shoulder, toying lightly with the material of her blouse.

"Take your filthy hands off me! Jane snapped, silence ripped by her revulsion of his touch.

"The letter?" he snapped. The quiet that filled the room was ominous. Then Keinin gave a firm pull at the collar of Janets blouse, and it ripped free, taking part of the bodice with it.

Trembling, but still proud, Jane finally spoke, "It will do you no good, and you shall pay for this insult. But give me the paper and pen. I do not intend to give you and your filthy friend any further entertainment!"

Even as she spoke, the Belgian had pulled a dirty piece of paper and a scrap of pencil from his pocket. He handed it, grinningly, to the proud woman. Jane walked across to the altar which highlighted one end of the room, and leaning upon it wrote a rapid, short note to her beloved husband. She said exactly what she had been told to say, no more and no less. She did then, just after her signature, add one short line. "My love and care to Kala." Keinin, who had followed her across the room, frowned as she handed him the paper.

"Who is this Kala?" He looked threateningly at Tarzan's wife. "Why is this in the letter?"

"She is but the wife of Basuli, the brave Waziri your men wounded so badly last night. I fear she may need a word of good cheer."

"Take her back to her prison, Narda. I'll write a further message to her husband, to go with this, and we'll lay our plans for delivery when you return."

Jane left the room, with wildly beating heart. It had worked. Her code had worked. For Kala was not the mate of Basuli. She was indeed the giant she-ape who had been mother to Tarzan, and who had taught him all of his jungle lore. Kala had died to protect him from an evil person. Jane's reference to Kala was her way of telling Tarzan that she too would die to keep him safe. He would not fall in with Keinin's evil plans after he read that message!

CHAPTER XII

The Meeting with the Apes

When he left Lyta Tarzan had traveled speedily through the jungle toward his home. He heard not the humming of the jungle insects nor the chattering life of the lesser monkeys and the birds. He sped through the upper terrace, ignoring the game trails beneath, even as his hunger grew again. That Jane would remain unharmed for the time being, he was confident. They would only have taken her as a means of getting to him. But he felt the need of much speed in getting home, in getting the battle lined up, and a need to call upon his childhood friends, the great apes. For once the Belgian and Narda, his priestess, learned that Tarzan would not work with them, then Jane's life was indeed endangered.

Tarzan was but an hour from his homesite when his keen ears caught the sound of men marching beneath him. This, indeed, was a strange thing. Despite the urgency of his mission, Tarzan descended from the upper terrace to discover the cause. For a moment, as he reached the thickly foliated lower terrace, he stood in statuesque silence, listening, his sensitive nostrils dilating as he read the full-spoken clues in each passing breeze. He crept along a heavy branch which gave him both full concealment and a clear view of the path below. Within a moment Basuli walked into his view, alert and watchful. In a single file behind him, one behind the next, were perhaps forty other of the Waziri, all in full battle regalia, all armed to the teeth. Giving the same, soft call through which he had located Kam-jei, Tarzan waited for recognition from his brave chief-tain. Halting, hand in air assinal to his warriors to delay their march,

Basuli returned the call. Tarzan dropped from the trees, and embraced the faithful man.

Basuli wept.

"You could not have helped it, Basuli. They are strange, fierce enemies, and I too was prey to their vicious weapons. I know, without being told, that you battled bravely to protect my wife. Tell me, though, how came the Belgian beast to capture her?"

"There were three of them, *bwana*. One, I think, was a good man. He fought as one possessed, and he killed many of those creatures defending your lady. The other two, I think are most evil,"

"I'm sure, but . . . ?"

"They arrived while we were out seeking the cause of the great silence, and the whereabouts of our runner Kamjei. I know not what large lies they told Lady Jane, *bwana*, but she came out to our campsite with them. It was at that time I decided you would wish me to stay with the lady rather than to follow your trail through the Jungle. Not," and the tears welled once again to the eyes of the brave warrior, "that I was of much help to her when she was in such dire distress."

"Basuli!" Tarzan spoke severely. He had assured the warrior once of his valor, he would not do so again. The Waziri recognized the correction of his attitude within Tarzan's voice, and visibly struggled to regain his composure. Tarzan smiled, then turning toward the war party asked, "'What then, Basuli, is this? Where are you and your brave men marching? For what purpose "

"In search of you, Tarzan. And with all of our weapons should we come across any of those vile creatures."

"Instruct them to turn back to the compound."

"But your lady . . ."

"Do as I say, Basuli. We shall lay our battle plans in the comparative safety of the compound. And we shall need more than the Waziri weapons to protect us from the viciousness of this enemy. That venom they use. They can blind a man from yards away, before he is even aware of their presence. They have no smell. They have much evil power. But," and Tarzan smiled confidently, "they also have a great weakness. We shall defeat them, Basuli. Have no fear. But we go into battle prepared for all exigencies! Now . . ."

Basuli issued a string of guttural orders to the patiently waiting warriors. Without expression, they turned and began the long trek back to the compound. Tarzan and Basuli followed, deep in conversation. When they came to the site of the bloody battle from the night before, Tarzan looked about in dismay. His heart was sickened within, not only for the brave dead. Waziri who littered the area, but for the horror the eyes of his beloved had witnessed. To the bodies of the snake-men, he paid little attention, excepting to say once again to Basuli that he had obviously fought a brave and valorous battle.

Once back at the compound, Tarzan showed Basuli how to prepare a face guard from the hides of deer, of which there were many on the premises. The most intricate part of the thing was the eye-slot which was cut so as to give full vision to the wearer, yet at the same time to cover his eye to all but the closest danger. This, he had decided as he swung through the upper terraces on his way home, was a necessity for his warriors in this forthcoming battle. Eating rapidly, even as bespoke, the sinewy man advised Basuli to have all of his warriors prepare masks for themselves. To this new weapon, he added

that of a large, iron pointed stake to be worn on a collar about the necks of the warriors.

"The snake-men," he pointed out to Basuli, "when they do attack you personally, fall from trees and cliffsides upon your neck. Their most sensitive area is that skin which serves as their own necks, half human, half snake. These sharp spears, therefore, will serve us as a means of protection, or, at least, as an assurance that the assailant is wounded before the final battle begins."

"You are a wise man, Tarzan," Basuli said. "Our usual weapons would mean little against such an enemy as this."

"They shall mean much, Basuli. But we need more than just those weapons. I go now to the land of the great apes. Assure your warriors they will be fighting with us. Your men will have nothing to fear from them." Basuli's eyes flashed. "But, *bwana*, the mangani hate my people. They have always hated us. And my people will not fight at their side."

"I have spoken, Basuli. Tell them, in this battle, we fight as one people. We must, or we may well be defeated!"

Basuli was still muttering to himself as Tarzan, finished with his meal, walked toward the gate of the compound and disappeared from view.

As the ape-man swung once again through the leafy boughs of the upper terrace, he made plans for his forthcoming parley with his childhood brothers. In the interest of time it was his wish that he meet first with one of the great apes known to him father than with one of the new breed which had grown since he'd left the home of his happy childhood. As chance was, his wish did not come true this day. As he dropped from the terrace onto the broad path which led between huge piles of crumpled ruins toward the home of the apes, he came face to face with a young hairy bull ape. As they met, the taunts and insults of others of the breed could be heard from behind the protection of the ruins. Tarzan had obviously walked into a new tribe, all of them strangers to him. But the ape-man knew no fear among these massive beasts. To those who flung their taunts and insults from hiding points of vantage, Tarzan returned the taunts, adding a challenge of his own and calling attention to their cowardice in refusing to show themselves. The hairy bull ape moved closer toward Tarzan, in his stiff-legged, bristly fashion. His yellow fangs were bared, and he gave forth great rumbling snarls of anger and barking through his thick, angry purple lips. Tarzan answered in kind and the hairy bull watched in stunned amazement as the ape-man stooped until his closed knuckles rested upon the ground, just as did those of the bull ape. He circled the great beast, sniffing his rage, moving in the same stiff-legged fashion in which he had been approached. He gave forth the same bestial barkings and fearful growlings which had been issuing from the throat of his self-declared enemy. Tarzan knew his apes very well. The challenge from the young bull ended as had so many previous encounters in his jungle life—with the boasting animal losing his nerve but saving his face by taking a vast and sudden interest in the lice upon his stomach, or, as in this case, a leaf which fell quietly down into the pathway. As quickly as the danger had arisen, it was ended. The hairy ape reached down for the leaf, throwing Tarzan one last glance of half-hearted challenge, then retiring in stiff dignity to inspect the welcomed interrupting factor. For a moment, happy despite the desperate circumstances, to be back in his only true home, Tarzan was tempted to pursue the argument, to show this young upstart who was the king of the jungle. He swaggered forward truculently, stuck out his chest and roared another challenge to the bull. As the sound issued from his lips, he pulled himself from the memories of the past, and turned his back upon his own challenge, moving forward down the avenue toward the lair of the older apes. The young bull watched him curiously as he passed.

When he reached the lair it was with dismay that he saw only strange apes, mostly young and none too friendly. They moved forward to thwart the interloper, stopping in awe and concern as the

words of the ape greeting issued from the mouth of the huge smooth-skinned ape. "Who are you, that you speak the language of the mangani?"

"I am Tarzan." The ape-man spoke quietly, but with much pride. "I am the mightiest of hunters, the greatest of all fighters. When I speak, the jungle listens. When I roar it trembles with terror. I am Tarzan of the Apes. You are my people. I have been away for a long time, but now I have returned to you."

An old she-ape who had remained huddling in the shadows moved forward as Tarzan spoke, "It is Tarzan. He speaks truth. I remember him. His mother was Kala. His fellow mangani was Neeta, he who was killed last by the hunters."

At this verification of his claim to kinship, the other apes moved closer and sniffed about the ape-man. He stood quite still, tolerating their movements, but mouth still set in a snarl and muscles tensed and in fighting condition. None of the apes questioned the smell he gave forth, however, and by their silence consented to his belonging among them. As two of the she-apes brought forth some food for their new family member Tarzan began to speak to the great bull ape who had first spoken to him. He told him of the invasion of the snake-men. He told him of the great silence with which they filled the jungle. He told him of their massive strength, their vicious poisoned venom, their mad priestess. He asked that they lend him some of their strongest fighters to go with him and wipe out this new scourge of the jungle. After considerable argument among themselves, Tarzan then pointed out that if the snake-men were not removed from the jungle now, before the next full moon when they would replenish their weakened forces, they might gain full possession and enslave all beasts, even the powerful mangani. Still they argued together. Tarzan might be one of them, but only the oldest recalled him, and the young had no reason to realize his great bravery. Finally one of them, a young ape, strong and endowed with a greater sense of intelligence than most of the others, agreed to join Tarzan in the fight. His imagination had been fired by Tarzan's tale, and the fight seemed to smell of adventure and battle. Kuchek was his name, and now he joined Tarzan in trying to persuade others of his kind to come with them. The discussions continued throughout the waning afternoon, and finally a second of the apes agreed to join the foray. Tombak was no longer young, but he was a mighty beast, heavily muscled and with the craft and cunning of many battles behind him. He was of such gigantic proportions, Tarzan thought as he looked him over, that four of the snake-men together couldn't bring him down. In the land of the great apes where so many of the anthropoids were of a morose and sullen temper, his disposition was of so evil a nature that even here he stood apart. Glancing toward the late afternoon sun, Tarzan gave up the argument, and decided to go forth with the two apes instead of the many he had hoped would join him. They were better than none, and time was too important to risk losing the light travel hours on the off-chance that possibly one or even two more mangani would join them.

As they set off for the compound of Tarzan where the Waziri awaited the coming of hordes of them, the rest of the tribe simply stared after them, without a gesture of goodbye, good luck or even of simple interest. Before they were out of sight, the tribe had resumed feeding. On the return trip, Tarzan had no difficulty persuading Kuchek and Tombak to move swiftly; both of them were chafing from a period of inactivity and gloried in swinging at breathtaking rapidity through the trees. He did, however, find difficulty in impressing on them the importance of being friendly with his Waziri warriors. Each time Tarzan succeeded in making his point, he would wait a while, then start in pounding his point into their small brains again. For the mind of the ape lacks the power of long-sustained concentration. To learn something for "now" is easy and imperative to their lives; to remember it for "later" is quite another thing. As the sun sank closer to the horizon Tarzan had a bit of a time keeping up the pace of the journey. His original spirits fulfilled by the exhilarating speed at which they'd been moving, Kuchek began to find other matters which seemed to call for his immediate attention—such as a newly fallen tree with its rich forage of grubs and beetles beneath. It almost came to a battle to get Kuchek to leave this treasure, and only at

renewed mention of the snake-men and Narda, their priestess, did the young ape agree to forego his feast and continue the trip.

The interruptions grew more constantly as the journey went on. Fortunately for Tarzan, the two apes had left their lair before completing their afternoon meal. Therefore, as delay after delay came up, he found the easiest way to end it was to make much mention of the huge feast awaiting them within his compound. It was not always easy to maintain their sustained interest in the fight and the cause behind it, but the mention of food, increasingly exaggerated by Tarzan, served the purpose.

The three arrived at the compound Just before sundown. The first thing Tarzan saw as he entered it was the tall figure of Kamjei, his number one runner.

"Kamjei, he exclaimed, running forward, "how did you . . ."

The weary native handed Tarzan a note. It was the letter from Jane.

CHAPTER XIII

The Death Insurance

Lyta's fury knew no bounds when she was told of the escaped or kidnapped runner, Kamjei. All day, since her return from the jungles and her talk with Tarzan, Lyta had been plotting and planning with her snake-men. They had searched hitherto unexplored tunnels and caverns in the beehive that was the cliff fortress in the Valley of the Volcanos. Lyta had earnestly hoped they might find the secret hiding place, in which her sister Narda had imprisoned the wife of Tarzan. She knew now that he would help her people, but she hoped to remove his mate from the clutches of the night group so as to remove his mind from the problems of the woman, and keep it on the problems of Lyta's people. They had met with no success, although they had uncovered several of the lairs of the snake-men themselves, and killed them as they lay helpless because of the sun.

How, she wanted to scream the thoughts aloud, how had Kamjei escaped? When had he escaped? Could it be—of course! The Belgian was back. He must have been exploring the caverns as her men had been doing, and through an inexplicable stroke of luck had discovered the room in which Kamjei had been supposedly safely kept. But why, Lyta asked herself, and Lerta, her chamberlain, leader of her valiant snake-men—why would they want Kamjei when they have the wife of Tarzan?

"It is good, I think," the great snake advised her, "that we have called upon this man Tarzan for help. For while we have the heads and brains of the tarmangani, we have not lived among them, Lyta."

"What can that have to do with Kamjei?" the woman snapped irritably.

"Since the evil Belgian has bewitched Narda, much has happened we do not understand. We do not know why she has warred upon us, her own people. Sometimes I wonder if she herself does know. But the Belgian does. All that has come to pass which has been bad has come to pass since Narda fell under his spell."

"Lerta, you make much circumlocution. We were speaking of Kamjei, the friend of Tarzan. I had

guaranteed his safety. Now, what will Tarzan think of me—or our people?"

"Being a man who has lived amongst men, he has surely known evil as well as good. Perhaps he will have the answer for us. In the meantime, we had best send two of our men into the jungles toward the compound of Tarzan. Perhaps they may find the missing runner."

"Yes. But they are not to recapture him. Merely to assure themselves of his safe return to his master. This time he will not give in easily to hypnotism. This time the shock of our dearly beloved people will not 'horrify' him. He might fight. He might injure them, or even force them to do harm to him. But send two of our scouts. If they find him, it will do much to ease my mind."

Narda's pleasure and sense of triumph when Keinin returned with the trembling Kamjei, for Lyta, had guessed correctly as to the means of his disappearance, were destroyed completely later in the day as she made her rounds. She found cave after cave filled with the dead bodies of her men. She stalked furiously back to her quarters as Keinin and Pierre Sortie sprawled indolently upon the floor discussing their rich, full future, and confronted them. "So, you spent the morning seeking out the prisoner of Lyta, my sister. For a messenger for your new friend, Tarzan of the Apes! And while you did so, the snake-men of the day invaded our fortress, and now more of my men lie dead in the cliff beneath us! We shall not raid tonight, Keinin. We shall not raid tonight, nor tomorrow night, nor the next. Enough of this bloodshed. Take your hands off me!" Eyes blazing with mad fury, Narda pushed the Belgian half-way across the room.

"Narda," the wheedling voice which had changed the course of Narda's life and all but brought her world down about her in ruins came across the eerily lit room. my beautiful Narda, you must calm yourself. You must understand. We shall not have to raid tonight, nor tomorrow night. If only you would listen to your Leopold. Kamjei is already en route to Tarzan with the note. That note will be the end of Lyta, and the end of her vicious followers. It is sad, I know, and, my darling, my heart does bleed for you, that more of your beloved people have been murdered in their sleep. But it has been to end all of this that I have endangered my life, and the life of my friend, Pierre. It has been to entrap Tarzan into helping our cause, that I did not guard the chambers but went in search of Kamjei. You must realize this Narda. Remember our plans? Remember all of our beautiful dreams . . . remember, Narda?"

"I must rest. Forgive me, Leopold—Pierre, but even though you may find my people grotesque, they are my people. Somehow, I don't know," her body drooped as if in pain, her voice was filled with anguish, "I just can't seem to remember how it all started, or why..."

The two men looked sharply at each other. This was not apart of the plan. Narda must continue her war; the snake-people must kill each other off, or all had been for naught. The Belgian moved once again—to take the lovely woman in his arms. This time she did not resist his caress. "You rest, my lovely Narda. Pierre and I will take good care no more harm befalls your people."

Despite her anguish, the corrupted priestess felt a stir of pleasure awaken once again within her heathen heart. "Yes, Leopold," her soft, velvety fingers stroked his face at first gently, then intensely. "Yes, Leopold, my beloved." She did not speak to Sortie as she walked lissomely across the room and vanished through a small, almost completely hidden doorway.

The Belgian began to pace back and forth across the room as though plagued by demons. "That runner had better get to Tarzan today, Pierre, or this whole thing is going to blow up in our faces. Already Narda is thinking more of her people than she is of me. For the first time, she seems to be escaping from her passionate instincts—the very instincts which allowed me to set this entire scheme of things into movement."

The German pushed himself up to a full sitting position. "I think you are right, Keinín," he drawled slowly, "and I think we'd better try to figure some kind of insurance for ourselves just in case the runner doesn't make it—or in case the ape-man doesn't fall in with us."

The Belgian's eyes narrowed. "Just. what kind of insurance did you have in mind, Pierre?" To himself, he was wondering if there was some possible way to dump the entire mess into his friend's lap, should Narda revolt, or should Tarzan refuse the ransom plea.

"You got into Lyta's fortress today—to get the runner. What if we could get the priestess herself? That'd stop the day snakes until we get out of here. After all, Keinín, we don't need too much of this radium to be wealthy. Better to be rich and alive than a millionaire and dead!"

"Your second suggestion has merit. Your first is sheer stupidity!"

The German's beefy face flushed with anger which he quickly controlled. After all, he thought, for the time being, this has to be his game. But he'll pay for that remark when and if we get out of this filthy hole. "Stupidity? To capture the leader of an opposing force? I fail to see your objections?"

"Think it over for a minute, Pierre. Lyta is Narda's sister. They have been closer than any family or friends in the world we know because of the physical problems involved. Narda is beginning to feel remorseful about 'her people'—about the war itself. If we bring Lyta over here, and Narda speaks with her for even a short time, she'll end the war right then and there. Perhaps even without speaking to her, just by seeing her, she'd end hostilities. And," he pointed an accusing finger at the German, "don't suggest hiding her where Narda can't see her. It won't work, and you know it. That snake-woman gets all over this valley. They both do, for that matter. No, capturing Lyta isn't the kind of insurance that can do either of us any good."

The two men sat, staring pensively at the flickering light emanating from the heaps of radium-rich dirt. As if they were one, suddenly they both looked up and spoke at the same time:

"Jane Clayton!"

"Even as they spoke, Jane and the young American were fighting the depths of despair together. Throughout the long day they had heard many times the sounds of movement about their prison, but no one had come near them. Had either known the sounds were those of the friendly snake-men as opposed to their captors, just a faint cry for help would have been the means of their release. Neither Jane nor Bill Harvey, however, knew of the existence of a friendly group of snake-men. To them, the horrors of the previous night were their full knowledge of these strange mutants. So they remained silent, hoping only to escape the painful jets of venom their captors used so freely.

As the hours passed, their spirits became more and more depressed. He, because despite her courtesies and womanly gratitude, he still felt responsible for the situation she was now facing. Jane, because of her deep love for Tarzan and the unspoken fear that he might disregard her pleas and do as her vile jailers asked. When Narda brought them some food, wild berries, fruit and a strange, jelly-like substance which both left untouched, Jane scrambled to her feet and tried to speak to the priestess. Still heartsick from the death of her followers, and still slightly enamored of the vicious Belgian who'd brought it about, Narda slapped the American woman across the face with a stinging blow. As Bill Harvey jumped to her aid, Narda lashed at him with her forked tongue. "Silence both of you! And do not tempt me further. As their priestess," and Narda drew herself to her full height, "I, too, have the power of the poisonous venom. Do not force me to use it on you again. Eat, and wait. That is all either of you must do.

You shall not be visited again this night," Without another word the priestess whirled and left the room, a grinning snake-man taking guard before the entrance.

Jane and Bill Harvey looked at one another in helpless desperation.

CHAPTER XIV

The Invaders

Basuli had done his Job well. If the Waziri warriors did not want to fight with the great mangani, they disguised the fact. Kamjei, the runner, though on the verge of exhaustion, wanted to join them.

Tarzan knew a giant relief when he read the message from Jane. The reference to Kala, the giant she-ape who had suckled him, told the ape-man that he had selected a fine and true woman as his mate—a woman who would put his own heart and righteousness before her safety. The message from Keinin had a very different effect. The brazen demand that Tarzan of the Apes lend himself to the ugly treachery of wiping out an innocent group of people, though they be horrendously malformed, and the Belgian's blithe assumption that a person of his ilk had outwitted and could order about the king of the jungle brought rage to Tarzan's heart. While he had planned to await the dawn before moving his strange army through the jungle and into the Valley of the Volcanos, the message from the evil Keinin served to dissuade him. They would move that night. They would, he abruptly advised Basuli, get ready to march forward within the hour!

As the orders were given to the Waziri, and they began to prepare their strange and unorthodox battle garb, Tarzan called Basuli to a conference he was holding with Kuchek and Tombak. He explained his strategy quickly, glancing from time to time with his keen grey eyes at the two mangani and at his Waziri leader to ascertain if they were absorbing his instructions.

"Of the day-snakes, we need have no fear. It is difficult to tell the two tribes apart, except for one major thing. If one of you come across a snake-man who lies inactive in his hiding place, do not harm him. He is one of Lyta's people. He is on our side. And he can do no injury to us while Goro the moon is in the skies. There is but one hour when confusion might arise—that of the dawn. For it is then that the night men begin to lose their powers as the day snakes regain their own. During that hour, neither group has full use of his capacities. It is, however, my earnest hope that our fight will be over before another dawn arises."

The number one wife of Basuli interrupted the conference by her arrival on the scene with an assortment of odd clothing. These Tarzan handed to Kuchek and Tombak, advising them to select those which were least binding. When the two apes looked at him in rebellious questioning the ape-man explained, "It is best, should we encounter the night snakes, they do not realize the power of their enemies. If they think of you as tarmangani because you wear the clothes of my people, they will be less cautious," Not thoroughly understanding, but with their childlike minds enjoying the play-acting, the two apes followed his instructions. To Basuli, Tarzan said: "I shall go ahead of your men. With me I take Tombak, the eldest of the great apes. Kuchek will follow and guard the rear ranks. Of one thing, be on the alert, Basuli."

"What is it?" the brave warrior questioned.

"Watch out for the great silence of the jungle. Should it fall about you, gather your men together and prepare to fight in open battle. I shall cover every possible place of concealment, but still, I know not the ways of these snake-men when in the Jungles. It is conceivable, although not probable, that I may miss a few of them. The silence does not fall while they are immobile. It comes only when they move. So listen carefully for it, Basuli. The lives of your men are at stake!"

The two men and their two strange companions moved out of the bungalow and into the compound where the weirdly garbed Waziris awaited them. As they walked, Tarzan gave his final orders to Basuli. "When we arrive at the Valley of the Volcanos, you are to place some of your men at strategic spots about the clearing before the lake of boiling oil. The others, led by you, will follow Tombak and me across the clearing and into the cliffs. I know a secret entrance into the fortress of Lyta, the priestess. Again, warn your men to use great stealth. I have been told the acoustics of the cliff dwellings hold no secrets to the ears of Narda, the warring priestess."

Basuli had listened attentively, now nodded, and without another word, moved forward to lead his men across the compound and out into the dark jungle ahead. Tarzan and Tombak walked with them, as Kuchek loped grotesquely along behind. As they reached the jungle, Tarzan lifted his arm in a gesture of encouragement to the gleaming warriors, then swung gracefully into the lower branches of a huge tree, followed immediately by the strangely garbed great ape. The assault upon Narda and her evil lover was underway. There would be no turning back!

In a little moonlit glade, several miles into the jungle, Basuli and his men came to a halt as the bronzed body of Tarzan glided swiftly down from a tree, and dropped before the Waziri chieftain. From the concealment of a nearby bush, Numa, the lion, eyed the group hungrily, but wary of their numbers.

"It is most strange, Basuli. Listen to the jungle." The night sounds were busy about them. "We have covered every swale for miles ahead. The snake-men are not about. Yet certainly the evil Belgian and the priestess Narda would have them out this night, awaiting my arrival. I do not like it. I go forward, Basuli, this time on foot. Follow me, but with ever-increasing care." As he spoke, the ape-man moved silently and "swiftly down the narrow trail ahead. From the bush, Numa watched in hungry satisfaction. One of them waste be his meal then. He would not have to risk the spears and weapons of the many.

Along the trail, the ape-man was at the keenest peak of his jungle alertness. The jungle was wide; the snake-men were new to his knowledge, but' wide too was the cunning of Tarzan—and he had not lived through his amazing childhood and fantastic manhood by failing to meet the challenge of the new. As he progressed, rapidly, but with great caution, the tawny beast, Numa, followed the same way. The wind was with Numa this night, as it veered constantly away from Tarzan, thus keeping the scent of Numa from his nostrils. Only because of this was the huge lion able to approach so closely to the ape-man. Some sixth, inner sense, however, came to Tarzan as Numa crouched for his kill. Although his back was to the lion, and he could not see the broad head fringed in its mane, the powerful hind paws gathering close beneath the empty belly readying for its lunge, still Tarzan hesitated. He was just wheeling about as the lion alighted full upon his broad shoulders. There was within Tarzan, immediately, all of the cunning, all of the ferocity, all of the physical prowess and saving instincts his jungle life had taught him so well. He closed with the beast in a death struggle so fearless and abandoned that the great Numa would have done well to move toward a hasty retreat. Seizing the lion by his mane, Tarzan buried his teeth deep into his throat, at the same time reaching his hunting knife and plunging it over and over again into the body of the great lion. As they fought, Tarzan growled the hideous ape sounds he had learned as a child, and the lion roared in rage and pain. Over and over the two battled with demonic fury, until finally the knife of Tarzan hit the heart of the great cat. As Tarzan removed himself from the bloody carcass, he raised a foot, placed it upon the bloody mane, and lifting his face to Goro, the moon, gave forth the hideous

victory cry of the bull apes.

On the trail behind him, Basuli and his warriors shuddered at the wild sound. Before him, Tombak smiled knowingly, cunning ape-eyes bloodshot and pleased. One of his kind had made a kill. Another enemy of the mangani was no longer alive in the Jungle.

Tarzan pulled the bloody carcass to the shrubs alongside the game trail, and now, emitting a soft, low sound from his mouth, signaled to Basuli that he was once again taking to the trees. The huge native returned the signal, and the Waziri moved forward more swiftly than before.

The moon was low in the night sky as Tarzan and his group of invaders arrived at the Valley of the Volcanos. No other incidents had marred their travel, much to the surprise and increasing unease of the ape-man. He moved forward quietly, followed by Basuli and his chosen men; the other of the Waziri, together with Kuchek and Tombak remained across the clearing. To the naked eye, the clearing was empty, but it was a place of great danger to any who might venture therein.

Through the dark and wet caverns, Tarzan and his men moved, ever forward, as silent as the quiet of death. From time to time they would come to a complete halt, fearing even to breathe, as a slithery, rustling sound in a nearby cavern would indicate the presence of a snake-man. Finally, they arrived at the cavern of Lyta. Tarzan bade Basuli and his men remain still and silent in the tunnel, as he made his presence known to the lovely priestess. She, however, cried out in amazement at his sudden appearance, and the ears of Narda, her sister, heard the sound.

Hastening to her secret point of vantage, curious as to the meaning of Lyta's exclamation, Narda could hear the sound of soft whispering. Even from this spot, she could not make out the words, but she was wise enough to realize that if Lyta had someone with whom to speak during the hours of Goro, the moon, it could only be Tarzan of the Apes. Narda glided softly back to her chambers and sent Nerag, her leader, to fetch the Belgian and his friend Pierre Sortie.

Back in Lyta's chambers, her first amazement had turned into surprised delight. "I had not expected you to return until the hours of the sun, Tarzan. How come you here now? Surely the jungle is filled with her people!"

"Not only I have come here, Lyta, but I have brought with me a small army of my Waziri warriors and two of my brothers, the great mangani. Narda's men are not in my jungle tonight. There was none of the great silence. We met no harm. I wonder at this strange development."

"It is indeed strange. I had believed all of her forces to be outside tonight, for they have not come into our fortress in search of our lairs as they have done so often in the past."

"Then we must invade them now. I and my men. It is near the dawn. Should we experience too much difficulty, we can retreat and await the dawn."

"But, Tarzan! I can offer you no help during the hours of Goro. My people are immobile."

"Something is planned in that evil fortress. We cannot wait to find out. We must move at once!" With these words, Tarzan once again gave the soft, cooing signal which called Basuli into the chambers.

Across the valley, in her chambers, Narda was pacing back and forth in ferocious anger. Keinin and Sortie listened fearfully as the lushly beautiful priestess excoriated them. Gone was all of her passion for the evil Belgian. Her kingdom was at stake, and this man was the person who had put it there! Still,

Keinin had an advantage over Narda which was all but impossible to remove. He was the only human she had truly known. He was the only person now to whom she could turn. He alone would know what Tarzan of the Apes might do, and he alone could save her people. As she reached the end of the diatribe, Keinin sensed her realization of these facts, and sealed her fate with his next words.

"You must attack them tonight, Narda. You will lose some of your men, that is true. But if you do not stop Lyta before the dawn, you will lose everything. Call out your people. Send them into the fortress of Narda. Warn them against the ape-man, but he is not, after all, infallible. You captured him once. You can do so again!"

"You are right, of course. You will go with us?"

Keinin smiled evilly. "No, Narda. I shall stay here and guard your quarters, and our prisoners. Remember, she is his mate, and she is in our possession. We cannot risk his rescuing her while our fortress remains unprotected."

"But my guards can . . ."

"You will need all of your people for the invasion, Narda. Your forces have been vastly depleted. Now, you must wipe out Lyta's people. And you must hurry. There are few hours remaining for you."

So confused was the lithe young priestess that she failed to wonder why Keinin would want to remain alone with the prisoners, and why he wanted her to take *all* of her people into the enemy camp. She agreed, and within minutes, the entire cliffside was covered with the gleaming bodies of the snake-men moving en-masse toward the massacre of Lyta and her snake-men. The first sign of the attack was received by Tarzan and the priestess when the high, pitiable screams of her immobilized forces rose upechoing about them.

CHAPTER XV

The Rescue

Tarzan, Lyta and the Waziri troops sped rapidly down into the catacombs which riddled the cliffside fortress. Lyta led them as she went first to one lair, then another, still another. At the first one they reached, she wept at the sight of so many of her people, dead and dying before her. Tarzan felt great pity for the priestess, but the urgency of the situation did not allow for his expression of it. "We must reach the others. They cannot have found all of them as yet."

The brave priestess recovered her composure immediately, and ran ahead of Tarzan and his men to a second lair. Here, thankfully, the night people had not yet arrived. Stationing five of his Waziri before the entrance to the lair, iron-spiked collars glistening, weird face coverings in protection, Tarzan left them, as Lyta hastened toward another lair. Here, they came face to face with five of Narda's snake-men. Tarzan, they had been expecting; the sight of the glistening warriors, so wildly armored, and of Lyta, sister of their priestess, stunned the murderers. Before they had time to recover, Tarzan of the Apes had moved into their midst, knife flailing about, each blow a blow of death. Single-handed, the great ape-man disposed of four of the foul creatures. The fifth had seen the tide of the battle before Tarzan had time to reach him, and had slithered frantically away in search of Narda. Leaving the bodies of the snake-men

before the lair, and leaving another group of his Waziri on guard, Tarzan, Lyta and his depleted Waziri army ran hastily through the tunnels in search of more enemies.

Twice more they met and defeated a group of the night snakes. Twice more, they met the heartbreak of Lyta as they reached a lair to find her people destroyed. Now, the tide of the battle was indeed in their favor. Terror had overcome the snake-men of Narda. The news that Tarzan was not alone, and that his men had strange protection from their venom and aerial attacks all but demoralized the remaining members of Marda's tribe. Rallying them about her, she encouraged them: "We shall leave the fortress. They cannot follow us. We shall seek new hiding places, and remain in them, quiet and untouchable until the next full moon. Come, we'll claim our hostage and go out into the valley. He will not harm us while we hold her!"

The silence which filled the vast tunnels told Tarzan his enemy was temporarily defeated. Now, the small group moved more slowly as they went from lair to lair. No new invaders, no new deaths. Lyta's forces had come through the attack with less loss of life than had her once beloved sister.

"Lyta," Tarzan spoke with an air of urgency, "You must show me how to get into Narda's chambers,"

"Please, Tarzan, wait until the sunlit hours. We have won thus far, but over there it may well be a different situation."

"Don't you realize, Lyta, they have my wife. Now that they know I am against them, they will surely do her harm. There is no time to lose!"

When Narda and her few remaining snake-men arrived at the prison of Jane Clayton and Bill Harvey, it was with horror they found the girl gone, and Harvey, dead upon the floor, stabbed by the knife Narda had lovingly given Leopold Keinin. Her fury knew no bounds. She should have realized! She should never have trusted the fiend! With a sharp, sibilant word, she ordered her men to follow her, down into the tunnels, and out into the danger-filled world.

Once Lyta and Tarzan, together with Basuli and three other Waziri arrived at the chambers of Narda the night priestess, it was but a matter of moments before Tarzan himself was leading the way to the cave of Jane's imprisonment. Her beloved scent was still in the air, and it led him swiftly toward the lower levels of the cliff. As he entered the cave, he glanced about in dismay. Basuli, just behind him, looked down upon the broken body of Bill Harvey, and spoke to Tarzan: "He was the good one—the one who fought so valiantly at the kidnapping. Now, he seems to have died in her defense!"

An ugly growl reached the lips of Tarzan, as he spun about and ran out into the tunnel, nose raised in the air, sniffing once again for the scent of his mate. Jane, almost overcome with terror after the fight between the two men who would destroy her and her brave American friend, did not fight as the men led her rapidly through a maze of tunnels, ever downward, then out into the dimly lit clearing beside the lake of boiling waters. Glancing swiftly about, Keinin whispered to Sortie: "We'll cut across that way. You go first. We'll keep the woman between us." Himself too terrified to reason well, the selfish German brute obeyed. He had not taken twenty steps when his scream of anguish raised itself keenly upon the jungle night. Tombak, the eldest of the great apes had seen the movement beside the lake, and moved silently and swiftly toward the source. Sortie's back was broken by his first assault, then the maddened ape lifted the man and threw him spiraling across the clearing into the bubbling lake. No further sound was heard. When Tombak looked about for the other two strangers, they were not to be seen. Keinin had withdrawn into the cave entrance, dragging the terrified Jane with him.

From another entranceway issued a strange stream of creatures. It was Narda and her snake-men. From his vantage point in a tree at the far side of the clearing, Kuchek, the younger of the mangani, spied the priestess. This, he gloated, would be his captive. The snake-men behind her did not look too vicious to Kuchek, and his desire to capture a great prize clouded his tiny brain. Waiting until the group reached the edge of the clearing, where the frightened Waziri had also watched them approach, Kuchek's impatience was his downfall. As he leaped down from the tree and stepped before the beautiful snake-woman, her followers saw not his size, only the danger to their priestess. As Kuchek reached one great hairy arm toward Narda, a stream of poisonous venom issued from each snake-man behind her, and as the great ape went down with screams of pain emanating from his loosely huge lips, the snake-men coiled themselves about him, and, together, crushed life from his huge body.

Before they were uncoiled, Tombak and the Waziri were upon them. Spears pierced their necks, blood flowed about, and once again their venom failed to meet its marks. Across the clearing, the evil Belgian who had started this entire brutal war in his lust for the untold wealth Narda held in her hands watched the grim fight in a paroxysm of terror. The screams and vile sounds which forced their way into his cave, the unbelievably hideous warriors and creatures the first dim light of dawn showed his frightened eyes, were but enough to drive the villain out of his evil mind. Jane had swooned at her first sight of the great who'd killed Sortie. So engrossed was Keinin that failed to hear the approach of Tarzan of the Apes, who had followed scent of his beloved through the treacherous caverns to this final meeting place.

Suddenly, a cry of the utmost rage filled the cave, and turning, in mortal terror, Keinin had one look at this Tarzan of the Apes, about whom he had heard so many legends. One look, because by that time, Leopold Keinin was dead.

Leaning down tenderly to lift the unconscious body of his wife into his arms, the maddened ape-man of just a moment before became the gentlest of all creatures. Lyta, the priestess, coming into the cavern from behind, looked upon the scene in amazement, tears of a strange, almost envious emotion coming into her slanted, pale-blue eyes. This love of a man for his woman was to be something Lyta would never know. Her sister had known one kind of human, and had destroyed her kingdom because of him. But even the unsophisticated eyes of Lyta knew full well that Tarzan of the Apes was more of a man than any other in the world.

Joined now by Basuli, and the three Waziri, Tarzan turned to Lyta. "Lead him back through the tunnels for his men." Pointing out across the clearing, where the first rays of the sun were glistening on the bloodied bodies of the snake-people, and of Kuchek the ill-minded great ape, Tarzan continued, "Your enemy is vanquished. You may live now in peace, and allow the beasts and men of my world to live in peace also."

But Lyta, standing regally beside him, looked across the clearing and saw her defeated sister, standing mutely between two tall Waziri. "Tarzan," the lovely blonde girl asked, "may give my sister sanctuary? She cannot live in your world. I know she has caused many deaths, and given you much heartache, but she is not an evil woman. It was the man, the Belgian who corrupted her. Surely now, she has learned her lesson. Surely now, she will be true to her own kind."

Tarzan looked down at the beautiful woman. "You indeed have the heart of an angel. You are right. She is helpless now. Defenseless. It would not be just to kill such a woman. Nor would it be fair to force her to live in a strange world. If you and your people want her, she is yours."

Lyta flung him a quick glance of appreciation. As she walked across the clearing, Jane began to stir within the arms of Tarzan. With a glad cry, as her eyes opened to focus upon his beloved face, she threw her arms about him in an eager embrace. Out in the clearing, Lyta too had put her arms about her

fallen sister. The two women walked, hand and hand back into the caves. Narda faced Tarzan in abject humility. He spoke. "Your sister has chosen to forgive you, Narda. Now, go with her, and live happily with your people. Never again listen to the wiles of an evil man. Never again turn your back upon your own kind."

"Yes, Tarzan." Narda said no more. Slowly the two women started up the tunnel toward the cliffside fortress, followed by Basuli, in search of his faithful warriors.

"Straight as an arrow from a bow went Tarzan and Jane to their compound in the Jungles. In a silence composed of both joy and woe for the fallen friends, they passed through the familiar jungle, listening with great appreciation to the once deadened noises of the day—the screaming of the great cats, the chattering of the monkeys, the contented hum of the insects.

Two days later, there was left a small pile of the glowing dirt of light beside their bungalow. With it, a note from Lyta and Narda. "In gratitude. The evil man felt this was a great fortune. Perhaps it is. If so, this much is yours—and more whenever you might wish it."

Tarzan read it in astonishment. "It's radium, Tarzan," Jane told him, repeating her conversation with the poor dead American. "It harmed so many. Let us give it to the research people, that it may possibly save some lives in the future."

"We shall do it, Jane."

The two walked, hand and hand, down the steps of their bungalow, and over to the ever-bickering number one wife of Basuli. Tarzan and his mate were at home. At long last, truly at home.

