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## Chapter 10 - Through the Valley of the Shadow

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As Tarzan walked down the wild canon beneath the brilliant African moon the call of the jungle was strong upon him. The solitude and the savage freedom filled his heart with life and buoyancy. Again he was Tarzan of the Apes--every sense alert against the chance of surprise by some jungle enemy--yet treading lightly and with head erect, in proud consciousness of his might.

The nocturnal sounds of the mountains were new to him, yet they fell upon his ears like the soft voice of a half-forgotten love. Many he intuitively sensed--ah, there was one that was familiar indeed; the distant coughing of Sheeta, the leopard; but there was a strange note in the final wail which made him doubt. It was a panther he heard.

Presently a new sound--a soft, stealthy sound--obtruded itself among the others. No human ears other than the ape-man's would have detected it. At first he did not translate it, but finally he realized that it came from the bare feet of a number of human beings. They were behind him, and they were coming toward him quietly. He was being stalked.

In a flash he knew why he had been left in that little valley by Gernois; but there had been a hitch in the arrangements--the men had come too late. Closer and closer came the footsteps. Tarzan halted and faced them, his rifle ready in his hand. Now he caught a fleeting glimpse of a white burnoose. He called aloud in French, asking what they would of him. His reply was the flash of a long gun, and with the sound of the shot Tarzan of the Apes plunged forward upon his face.

The Arabs did not rush out immediately; instead, they waited to be sure that their victim did not rise. Then they came rapidly from their concealment, and bent over him. It was soon apparent that he was not dead. One of the men put the muzzle of his gun to the back of Tarzan's head to finish him, but another waved him aside. "If we bring him alive the reward is to be greater," explained the latter. So they bound his hands and feet, and, picking him up, placed him on the shoulders of four of their number. Then the march was resumed toward the desert. When they had come out of the mountains they turned toward the south, and about daylight came to the spot where their horses stood in care of two of their number.

From here on their progress was more rapid. Tarzan, who had regained consciousness, was tied to a spare horse, which they evidently had brought for the purpose. His wound was but a slight scratch, which had furrowed the flesh across his temple. It had stopped bleeding, but the dried and clotted blood smeared his face and clothing. He had said no word since he had fallen into the hands of these Arabs, nor had they addressed him other than to issue a few brief commands to him when the horses had been reached.

For six hours they rode rapidly across the burning desert, avoiding the oases near which their way led. About noon they came to a DOUAR of about twenty tents. Here they halted, and as one of the Arabs was releasing the alfa-grass ropes which bound him to his mount they were surrounded by a mob of men, women, and children. Many of the tribe, and more especially the women, appeared to take delight in heaping insults upon the prisoner, and some had even gone so far as to throw stones at him and strike him with sticks, when an old sheik appeared and drove them away.

"Ali-ben-Ahmed tells me," he said, "that this man sat alone in the mountains and slew EL ADREA. What the business of the stranger who sent us after him may be, I know not, and what he may do with this man when we turn him over to him, I care not; but the prisoner is a brave man, and while he is in our hands he shall be treated with the respect that be due one who hunts THE LORD WITH THE LARGE HEAD alone and by night--and slays him."

Tarzan had heard of the respect in which Arabs held a lion-killer, and he was not sorry that chance had played into his hands thus favorably to relieve him of the petty tortures of the tribe. Shortly after this he was taken to a goat-skin tent upon the upper side of the DOUAR. There he was fed, and then, securely bound, was left lying on a piece of native carpet, alone in the tent.

He could see a guard sitting before the door of his frail prison, but when he attempted to force the stout bonds that held him he realized that any extra precaution on the part of his captors was quite unnecessary; not even his giant muscles could part those numerous strands.

Just before dusk several men approached the tent where he lay, and entered it. All were in Arab dress, but presently one of the number advanced to Tarzan's side, and as he let the folds of cloth that had hidden the lower half of his face fall away the ape-man saw the malevolent features of Nikolas Rokoff. There was a nasty smile on the bearded lips. "Ah, Monsieur Tarzan," he said, "this is indeed a pleasure. But why do you not rise and greet your guest?" Then, with an ugly oath, "Get up, you dog!" and, drawing back his booted foot, he kicked Tarzan heavily in the side. "And here is another, and another, and another," he continued, as he kicked Tarzan about the face and side. "One for each of the injuries you have done me."

The ape-man made no reply--he did not even deign to look upon the Russian again after the first glance of recognition. Finally the sheik, who had been standing a mute and frowning witness of the cowardly attack, intervened.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Kill him if you will, but I will see no brave man subjected to such indignities in my presence. I have half a mind to turn him loose, that I may see how long you would kick him then."

This threat put a sudden end to Rokoff's brutality, for he had no craving to see Tarzan loosed from his bonds while he was within reach of those powerful hands.

"Very well," he replied to the Arab; "I shall kill him presently."

"Not within the precincts of my DOUAR," returned the sheik. "When he leaves here he leaves alive. What you do with him in the desert is none of my concern, but I shall not have the blood of a Frenchman on the hands of my tribe on account of another man's quarrel--they would send soldiers here and kill many of my people, and burn our tents and drive away our flocks."

"As you say," growled Rokoff. "I'll take him out into the desert below the DOUAR, and dispatch him."

"You will take him a day's ride from my country," said the sheik, firmly, "and some of my children shall follow you to see that you do not disobey me--otherwise there may be

two dead Frenchmen in the desert."

Rokoff shrugged. "Then I shall have to wait until the morrow--it is already dark."

"As you will," said the sheik. "But by an hour after dawn you must be gone from my DOUAR. I have little liking for unbelievers, and none at all for a coward."

Rokoff would have made some kind of retort, but he checked himself, for he realized that it would require but little excuse for the old man to turn upon him. Together they left the tent. At the door Rokoff could not resist the temptation to turn and fling a parting taunt at Tarzan. "Sleep well, monsieur," he said, "and do not forget to pray well, for when you die tomorrow it will be in such agony that you will be unable to pray for blaspheming."

No one had bothered to bring Tarzan either food or water since noon, and consequently he suffered considerably from thirst. He wondered if it would be worth while to ask his guard for water, but after making two or three requests without receiving any response, he decided that it would not.

Far up in the mountains he heard a lion roar. How much safer one was, he soliloquized, in the haunts of wild beasts than in the haunts of men. Never in all his jungle life had he been more relentlessly tracked down than in the past few months of his experience among civilized men. Never had he been any nearer death.

Again the lion roared. It sounded a little nearer. Tarzan felt the old, wild impulse to reply with the challenge of his kind. His kind? He had almost forgotten that he was a man and not an ape. He tugged at his bonds. God, if he could but get them near those strong teeth of his. He felt a wild wave of madness sweep over him as his efforts to regain his liberty met with failure.

Numa was roaring almost continually now. It was quite evident that he was coming down into the desert to hunt. It was the roar of a hungry lion. Tarzan envied him, for he was free. No one would tie him with ropes and slaughter him like a sheep. It was that which galled the ape-man. He did not fear to die, no--it was the humiliation of defeat before death, without even a chance to battle for his life.

It must be near midnight, thought Tarzan. He had several hours to live. Possibly he would yet find a way to take Rokoff with him on the long journey. He could hear the savage lord of the desert quite close by now. Possibly he sought his meat from among the penned animals within the DOUAR.

For a long time silence reigned, then Tarzan's trained ears caught the sound of a stealthily moving body. It came from the side of the tent nearest the mountains--the back. Nearer and nearer it came. He waited, listening intently, for it to pass. For a time there was silence without, such a terrible silence that Tarzan was surprised that he did not hear the breathing of the animal he felt sure must be crouching close to the back wall of his tent.

There! It is moving again. Closer it creeps. Tarzan turns his head in the direction of the sound. It is very dark within the tent. Slowly the back rises from the ground, forced up by the head and shoulders of a body that looks all black in the semi-darkness. Beyond is a faint glimpse of the dimly starlit desert. A grim smile plays about Tarzan's lips. At least Rokoff will be cheated. How mad he will be! And death will be more merciful than he could have hoped for at the hands of the Russian.

Now the back of the tent drops into place, and all is darkness again--whatever it is inside the tent with him. He hears it creeping close to him--now it is beside him. He closes his eyes and waits for the mighty paw. Upon his upturned face falls the gentle touch of a soft hand groping in the dark, and then a girl's voice in a scarcely audible whisper pronounces his name.

"Yes, it is I," he whispers in reply. "But in the name of Heaven who are you?"

"The Ouled-Nail of Sisi Aissa," came the answer. While she spoke Tarzan could feel her working about his bonds. Occasionally the cold steel of a knife touched his flesh. A moment later he was free.

"Come!" she whispered.

On hands and knees he followed her out of the tent by the way she had come. She continued crawling thus flat to the ground until she reached a little patch of shrub. There she halted until he gained her side. For a moment he looked at her before he spoke.

"I cannot understand," he said at last. "Why are you here? How did you know that I was a prisoner in that tent? How does it happen that it is you who have saved me?"

She smiled. "I have come a long way tonight," she said, "and we have a long way to go before we shall be out of danger. Come; I shall tell you all about as we go."

Together they rose and set off across the desert in the direction of the mountains.

"I was not quite sure that I should ever reach you," she said at last. "EL ADREA is abroad tonight, and after I left the horses I think he winded me and was following--I was terribly frightened."

"What a brave girl," he said. "And you ran all that risk for a stranger--an alien--an unbeliever?"

She drew herself up very proudly.

"I am the daughter of the Sheik Kabour ben Saden," she answered. "I should be no fit daughter of his if I would not risk my life to save that of the man who saved mine while he yet thought that I was but a common Ouled-Nail."

"Nevertheless," he insisted, "you are a very brave girl. But how did you know that I was a prisoner back there?"

"Achmet-din-Taieb, who is my cousin on my father's side, was visiting some friends who belong to the tribe that captured you. He was at the DOUAR when you were brought in. When he reached home he was telling us about the big Frenchman who had been captured by Ali-ben-Ahmed for another Frenchman who wished to kill him. From the description I knew that it must be you. My father was away. I tried to persuade some of the men to come and save you, but they would not do it, saying: 'Let the unbelievers kill one another if they wish. It is none of our affair, and if we go and interfere with Ali-ben-Ahmed's plans we shall only stir up a fight with our own people.'

"So when it was dark I came alone, riding one horse and leading another for you. They are tethered not far from here. By morning we shall be within my father's DOUAR. He should be there himself by now--then let them come and try to take Kadour ben Saden's friend."

For a few moments they walked on in silence.

"We should be near the horses," she said. "It is strange that I do not see them here."

Then a moment later she stopped, with a little cry of consternation.

"They are gone!" she exclaimed. "It is here that I tethered them."

Tarzan stooped to examine the ground. He found that a large shrub had been torn up by the roots. Then he found something else. There was a wry smile on his face as he rose and turned toward the girl.

"EL ADREA has been here. From the signs, though, I rather think that his prey escaped him. With a little start they would be safe enough from him in the open."

There was nothing to do but continue on foot. The way led them across a low spur of the mountains, but the girl knew the trail as well as she did her mother's face. They walked in easy, swinging strides, Tarzan keeping a hand's breadth behind the girl's shoulder, that she might set the pace, and thus be less fatigued. As they walked they talked, occasionally stopping to listen for sounds of pursuit.

It was now a beautiful, moonlit night. The air was crisp and invigorating. Behind them lay the interminable vista of the desert, dotted here and there with an occasional oasis. The date palms of the little fertile spot they had just left, and the circle of goatskin tents, stood out in sharp relief against the yellow sand--a phantom paradise upon a phantom sea. Before them rose the grim and silent mountains. Tarzan's blood leaped in his veins. This was life! He looked down upon the girl beside him--a daughter of the desert walking across the face of a dead world with a son of the jungle. He smiled at the thought. He wished that he had had a sister, and that she had been like this girl. What a bully chum she would have been!

They had entered the mountains now, and were progressing more slowly, for the trail was steeper and very rocky.

For a few minutes they had been silent. The girl was wondering if they would reach her father's DOUAR before the pursuit had overtaken them. Tarzan was wishing that they might walk on thus forever. If the girl were only a man they might. He longed for a friend who loved the same wild life that he loved. He had learned to crave companionship, but it was his misfortune that most of the men he knew preferred immaculate linen and their clubs to nakedness and the jungle. It was, of course, difficult to understand, yet it was very evident that they did.

The two had just turned a projecting rock around which the trail ran when they were brought to a sudden stop. There, before them, directly in the middle of the path, stood Numa, EL ADREA, the black lion. His green eyes looked very wicked, and he bared his teeth, and lashed his bay-black sides with his angry tail. Then he roared--the fearsome, terror-inspiring roar of the hungry lion which is also angry.

"Your knife," said Tarzan to the girl, extending his hand. She slipped the hilt of the weapon into his waiting palm. As his fingers closed upon it he drew her back and pushed her behind him. "Walk back to the desert as rapidly as you can. If you hear me call you will know that all is well, and you may return."

"It is useless," she replied, resignedly. "This is the end."

"Do as I tell you," he commanded. "Quickly! He is about to charge." The girl dropped back a few paces, where she stood watching for the terrible sight that she knew she should soon witness.

The lion was advancing slowly toward Tarzan, his nose to the ground, like a challenging bull, his tail extended now and quivering as though with intense excitement.

The ape-man stood, half crouching, the long Arab knife glistening in the moonlight. Behind him the tense figure of the girl, motionless as a carved statue. She leaned slightly forward, her lips parted, her eyes wide. Her only conscious thought was wonder at the bravery of the man who dared face with a puny knife the lord with the large head. A man of her own blood would have knelt in prayer and gone down beneath those awful fangs without resistance. In either case the result would be the same--it was inevitable; but she could not repress a thrill of admiration as her eyes rested upon the heroic figure before her. Not a tremor in the whole giant frame--his attitude as menacing and defiant as that of EL ADREA himself.

The lion was quite close to him now--but a few paces intervened--he crouched, and then, with a deafening roar, he sprang.