

# **Tarzan and the Golden Lion**

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## Chapter 1

### THE GOLDEN LION

Sabor, the lioness, suckled her young—a single fuzzy ball, spotted like Sheeta, the leopard. She lay in the warm sunshine before the rocky cavern that was her lair, stretched out upon her side with half closed eyes, yet Sabor was alert. There had been three of these little, fuzzy balls at first—two daughters and a son—and Sabor and Numa, their sire, had been proud of them; proud and happy. But kills had not been plentiful, and Sabor, undernourished, had been unable to produce sufficient milk to nourish properly three lusty cubs, and then a cold rain had come, and the little ones had sickened. Only the strongest survived—the two daughters had died. Sabor had mourned, pacing to and fro beside the pitiful bits of bedraggled fur, whining moaning. Now and again she would nose them with her muzzle as though she would awaken them from the long sleep that knows no waking.

At last, however, she abandoned her efforts, and now her whole savage heart was filled with concern for the little male cub that remained to her. That was why Sabor was more alert than usual.

Numa, the lion, was away. Two nights before he had made a kill and dragged it to their lair and last night he had fared forth again, but he had not returned. Sabor was thinking, as she half dozed, of Wappi, the plump antelope, that her splendid mate might this very minute be dragging through the tangled jungle to her. Or perhaps it would be Pacco, the zebra, whose flesh was the best beloved of her kind—juicy, succulent Pacco. Sabor's mouth watered.

Ah, what was that? The shadow of a sound had come to those keen ears. She raised her head, cocking it first upon one side and then the other, as with up-pricked ears she sought to catch the faintest repetition of that which had disturbed her.

Her nose sniffed the air. There was but the suggestion of a breeze, but what there was moved toward her from the direction of the sound she had heard, and which she still heard in a slightly increasing volume that told her that whatever was making it was approaching her. As it drew closer the beast's nervousness increased and she rolled over on her belly, shutting off the milk supply from the cub, which vented its disapproval in miniature growls until a low, querulous whine from the lioness silenced him, then he stood at her side, looking first at her and then in the direction toward which she looked, cocking his little head first on one side and then on the other.

Evidently there was a disturbing quality in the sound that Sabor heard—something that inspired a certain restlessness, if not actual apprehension—though she could not be sure as yet that it boded ill. It might be her great lord returning, but it did not sound like the movement of a lion, certainly not like a lion dragging a heavy kill. She glanced at her cub, breathing as she did so a plaintive whine. There was always the fear that some danger menaced him—this last of her little family—but she, Sabor the lioness, was there to defend him.

Presently the breeze brought to her nostrils the scent-spoor of the thing that moved toward her through the jungle. Instantly the troubled mother-face was metamorphosed into a bare-fanged, glittering-eyed mask of savage rage, for the scent that had come up to her through the jungle was the hated man-scent. She rose to her feet, her head flattened, her sinuous tail twitching nervously. Through that strange medium by which animals communicate with one another she cautioned her cub to lie down and remain where he was until she returned, then she moved rapidly and, silently to meet the intruder.

The cub had heard what its mother heard and now he caught the smell of man—an unfamiliar smell that had never impinged upon his nostrils before, yet a smell that he knew at once for that of an enemy—a smell that brought a reaction as typical as that which marked the attitude of the grown lioness, bringing the hairs along his little spine erect and baring his tiny fangs. As the adult moved quickly and stealthily into the underbrush the small cub, ignoring her injunction, followed after her, his hind quarters wobbling from side to side, after the manner of the very young of his kind, the ridiculous gait comporting ill with the dignified bearing of his fore quarters; but the lioness, intent upon that which lay before her, did not know that he followed her.

There was dense jungle before the two for a hundred yards, but through it the lions had worn a tunnel-like path to their lair; and then there was a small clearing through which ran a well-worn jungle trail, out of the jungle at one end of the clearing and into the jungle again at the other. As Sabor reached the clearing she saw the object of her fear and hatred well within it. What if the man-thing were not hunting her or hers? What if he even dreamed not of their presence? These facts were as nothing to Sabor, the lioness, today.. Ordinarily she would have let him pass unmolested, so long as he did not come close enough to threaten the safety of her cub; or, cubless, she would have slunk away at the first intimation of his approach. But today the lioness was nervous and fearful—fearful because of the single cub that remained to her—her maternal instincts centered threefold, perhaps, upon this lone and triply loved survivor —and so she did not wait for the man to threaten the safety of her little one; but instead she moved to meet him and to stop him. From the soft mother she had become a terrifying creature of destruction, her brain obsessed by a single thought—to kill.

She did not hesitate an instant at the edge of the clearing, nor did she give the slightest warning. The first intimation that the black warrior had that there was a lion within twenty miles of him, was the terrifying apparition of this devil-faced cat charging across the clearing toward him with the speed of an arrow. The black was not searching for lions. Had he known that there was one near he would have given it a wide berth. He would have fled now had there been anywhere to flee. The nearest tree was farther from him than was the lioness. She could overhaul him before he would have covered a quarter of the distance. There was no hope and there was only one thing to do. The beast was almost upon him and behind her he saw a tiny cub. The man bore a heavy spear. He carried it far back with his right hand and hurled it at the very instant that Sabor rose to seize him. The spear passed through the savage heart and almost simultaneously the giant jaws closed upon the face and skull of the warrior. The momentum of the lioness carried the two heavily to the ground, dead except for a few spasmodic twitchings of their muscles.

The orphaned cub stopped twenty feet away and surveyed the first great catastrophe of his life with questioning eyes. He wanted to approach his dam but a natural fear of the man-scent held him away. Presently he commenced to whine in a tone that always brought his mother to him hurriedly; but this time she did not come—she did not even rise and look toward him. He was puzzled—he could not understand it. He continued to cry, feeling all the while more sad and more lonely. Gradually he crept closer to his mother. He saw that the strange creature she had killed did not move and after a while he felt less terror of it, so that at last he found the courage to come quite close to his mother and sniff at her. He still whined to her, but she did not answer. It dawned on him at last that there was something wrong—that his great, beautiful mother was not as she had been—a change had come over her; yet still he clung to her, crying much until at last he fell asleep, cuddled close to her dead body.

It was thus that Tarzan found him—Tarzan and Jane, his wife, and their son, Korak the Killer, returning from the mysterious land of Pal-ul-don from which the two men had rescued Jane Clayton. At the sound of their approach the cub opened his eyes and rising, flattened his ears and snarled at them, backing close against his dead mother. At sight of him the ape-man smiled.

"Plucky little devil," he commented, taking in the story of the tragedy at a single glance. He approached the spitting cub, expecting it to turn and run away; but it did nothing of the sort. Instead it snarled more ferociously and struck at his extended hand as he stooped and reached for it.

"What a brave little fellow," cried Jane. "Poor little orphan!"

"He's going to make a great lion, or he would have if his dam had lived," said Korak. "Look at that back—as straight and strong as a spear. Too bad the rascal has got to die."

"He doesn't have to die," returned Tarzan.

"There's not much chance for him—he'll need milk for a couple of months more, and who's going to get it for him?"

"I am," replied Tarzan.

"You're going to adopt him?"

Tarzan nodded.

Korak and Jane laughed. "That'll be fine," commented the former.

"Lord Greystoke, foster mother to the son of Numa," laughed Jane.

Tarzan smiled with them, but he did not cease his attentions toward the cub. Reaching out suddenly he caught the little lion by the scruff of its neck and then stroking it gently he talked to it in a low, crooning tone. I do not know what he said; but perhaps the cub did, for presently it ceased its struggles and no longer sought to scratch or bite the caressing hand. After that he picked it up and held it against his breast. It did not seem afraid now, nor did it even bare its fangs against this close proximity to the erstwhile hated man-scent.

"How do you do it?" 'exclaimed Jane Clayton.

Tarzan shrugged his broad shoulders. "Your kind are not afraid of you—these are really my kind, try to civilize me as you will, and perhaps that is why they are not afraid of me when I give them the signs of friendship. Even this little rascal seems to know it, doesn't he?"

"I can never understand it," commented Korak. "I think I am rather familiar with African animals, yet I haven't the power over them or the understanding that you have. Why is it?"

"There is but one Tarzan," said Lady Greystoke, smiling at her son teasingly, and yet her tone was not without a note of pride.

"Remember that I was born among beasts and raised by beasts," Tarzan reminded him. "Perhaps after all my father was an ape—you know Kala always insisted that he was."

"John! How can you?" exclaimed Jane. "You know perfectly well who your father and mother were."

Tarzan looked solemnly at his son and closed one eye. "Your mother never can learn to appreciate the fine qualities of the anthropoids. One might almost think that she objected to the suggestion that she had mated with one of them."

"John Clayton, I shall never speak to you again if you don't stop saying such hideous things. I am ashamed of you. It is bad enough that you are an unregenerate wild-man, without trying to suggest that you may be an ape into the bargain."

The long journey from Pal-ul-don was almost completed— inside the week they should be again at the site of their former home. Whether anything now remained of the ruins the Germans had left was problematical. The barns and outhouses had all been burned and the interior of the bungalow partially wrecked. Those of the Waziri, the faithful native retainers of the Greystokes, who had not been killed by Hauptman Fritz Schneider's soldiers, had rallied to the beat of the war-drum and gone to place themselves at the disposal of the English in whatever capacity they might be found useful to the great cause of humanity. This much Tarzan had known before he set out in search of Lady Jane; but how many of his war-like Waziri had survived the war and what further had befallen his vast estates he did not know. Wandering tribes of natives, or raiding bands of Arab slavers might have completed the demolition inaugurated by the Hun, and it was likely, too, that the jungle had swept up and reclaimed its own, covering his dearings and burying amidst its riot of lush verdure every sign of man's brief trespass upon its world-old preserves.

Following the adoption of the tiny Numa, Tarzan was compelled to an immediate consideration of the needs of his protege in planning his marches and his halts, for the cub must have sustenance and that sustenance could be naught but milk.

Lion's milk was out of the question, but fortunately they were now in a comparatively well peopled country where villages were not infrequent and where the great Lord of the Jungle was known, feared, and respected, and so it was that upon the afternoon of the

day he had found the young lion Tarzan approached a village for the purpose of obtaining milk for the cub.

At first the natives appeared sullen and indifferent, looking with contempt upon whites who traveled without a large safari—with contempt and without fear. With no safari these strangers could carry no presents for them, nor anything wherewith to repay for the food they would doubtless desire, and with no askari they could not demand food, or rather they could not enforce an order, nor could they protect themselves should it seem worth while to molest them. Sullen and indifferent the natives seemed, yet they were scarce unconcerned, their curiosity being aroused by the unusual apparel and ornamentation of these whites. They saw them almost as naked as themselves and armed similarly except that one, the younger man, carried a rifle. All three wore the trappings of Pal-ul-don, primitive and barbaric, and entirely strange to the eyes of the simple blacks.

"Where is your chief?" asked Tarzan as he strode into the village amongst the women, the children, and the yapping dogs.

A few dozing warriors rose from the shadows of the huts where they had been lying and approached the newcomers.

"The chief sleeps," replied one. "Who are you to awaken him? What do you want?"

"I wish to speak to your chief. Go and fetch him!"

The warrior looked at him in wide-eyed amaze, and then broke into a loud laugh.

"The chief must be brought to him," he cried, addressing his fellows, and then, laughing loudly, he slapped his thigh and nudged those nearest him with his elbows.

"Tell him," continued the ape-man, "that Tarzan would speak with him."

Instantly the attitude of his auditors underwent a remarkable transformation—they fell back from him and they ceased laughing—their eyes very wide and round. He who had laughed loudest became suddenly solemn. "Bring mats," he cried, "for Tarzan and his people to sit upon, while I fetch Umanga the chief," and off he ran as fast as he could as though glad of the excuse to escape the presence of the mighty one he feared he had offended.

It made no difference now that they had no safari, no askari, nor any presents. The villagers were vying with one another to do them honor. Even before the chief came many had already brought presents of food and ornaments. Presently Umanga appeared. He was an old man who had been a chief even before Tarzan of the Apes was born. His manner was patriarchal and dignified and he greeted his guest as one great man might greet another, yet he was undeniably pleased that the Lord of the Jungle had honored his village with a visit.

When Tarzan explained his wishes and exhibited the lion cub Umanga assured him that there would be milk a-plenty so long as Tarzan honored them with his presence—warm milk, fresh from the chief's own goats. As they palavered the ape-man's keen eyes took in every detail of the village and its people, and presently they alighted upon a large

bitch among the numerous curs that overran the huts and the street. Her udder was swollen with milk and the sight of it suggested a plan to Tarzan. He jerked a thumb in the direction of the animal. "I would buy her," he said to Umanga.

"She is yours, Bwana, without payment," replied the chief. "She whelped two days since and last night her pups were all stolen from her nest, doubtless by a great snake; but if you will accept them I will give you instead as many younger and fatter dogs as you wish, for I am sure that this one would prove poor eating."

"I do not wish to eat her," replied Tarzan. "I will take her along with me to furnish milk for the cub. Have her brought to me."

Some boys then caught the animal and tying a thong about its neck dragged it to the ape-man. Like the lion, the dog was at first afraid, for the scent of the Tarmangani was not as the scent of the blacks, and it snarled and snapped at its new master; but at length he won the animal's confidence so that it lay quietly beside him while he stroked its head. To get the lion close to it was, however, another matter, for here both were terrified by the enemy scent of the other—the lion snarling and spitting and the dog bare-fanged and growling. It required patience—infinite patience—but at last the thing was an accomplished fact and the cur bitch suckled the son of Numa. Hunger had succeeded in overcoming the natural suspicion of the lion, while the firm yet kindly attitude of the ape-man had won the confidence of the canine, which had been accustomed through life to more of cuffs and kicks than kindness.

That night Tarzan had the dog tied ill the hut he occupied, and twice before morning he made her lie while the cub fed. The next day they took leave of Umanga and his people and with the dog still upon a leash trotting beside them they set off once more toward home, the young lion cuddled in the hollow of one of Tarzan's arms or carried in a sack slung across his shoulder.

They named the lion Jad-bal-ja, which in the language of the pithecanthropi of Pal-ul-don, means the Golden Lion, because of his color. Every day he became more accustomed to them and to his foster mother, who finally came to accept him as flesh of her flesh. The bitch they called Za, meaning girl. The second day they removed her leash and she followed them willingly through the jungle, nor ever after did she seek to leave them, nor was happy unless she was near one of the three.

As the moment approached when the trail should break from the jungle onto the edge of the rolling plain where their home had been, the three were filled with suppressed excitement, though none uttered a syllable of the hope and fear that was in the heart of each. What would they find? What could they find other than the same tangled mass of vegetation that the ape-man had cleared away to build his home when first he had come there with his bride?

At last they stepped from the concealing verdure of the forest to look out across the plain where, in the distance, the outlines of the bungalow had once been clearly discernible nestled amidst the trees and shrubs that had been retained or imported to beautify the grounds.

"Look!" cried Lady Jane. "It is there—it is still there!"



"But what are those other things to the left, beyond it?" asked Korak.

"They are the huts of natives," replied Tarzan.

"The fields are being cultivated!" exclaimed the woman.

"And some of the outbuildings have been rebuilt," said Tarzan. "It can mean but one thing—the Waziri have come back from the war—my faithful Waziri. They have restored what the Hun destroyed and are watching over our home until we return."

## Chapter 2

### THE TRAINING OF JAD-BAL-JA

And so Tarzan of the Apes, and Jane Clayton, and Korak came home after a long absence and with them came Jad-bal-ja, the golden lion, and Za, the bitch. Among the first to meet them and to welcome them home was old Muviro, father of Wasimbu, who had given his life in defense of the home and wife of the ape-man.

"Ah, Bwana," cried the faithful black, "my old eyes are made young again by the sight of you. It has been long that you have been gone, but though many doubted that you would return, old Muviro knew that the great world held nothing that might overcome his master. And so he knew, too, that his master would return to the home of his love and the land where his faithful Waziri awaited him; but that she, whom we have mourned as dead, should have returned is beyond belief, and great shall be the rejoicing in the huts of the Waziri tonight. And the earth shall tremble to the dancing feet of the warriors and the heavens ring with the glad cries of their women, since the three they love most on earth have come back to them."

And in truth, great indeed was the rejoicing in the huts of the Waziri. And not for one night alone, but for many nights did the dancing and the rejoicing continue until Tarzan was compelled to put a stop to the festivities that he and his family might gain a few hours of unbroken slumber. The ape-man found that not only had his faithful Waziri, under the equally faithful guidance of his English foreman, Jervis, completely rehabilitated his stables, corrals, and outbuildings as well as the native huts, but had restored the interior of the bungalow, so that in all outward appearances the place was precisely as it had been before the raid of the Germans.

Jervis was at Nairobi on the business of the estate, and it was some days after their arrival that he returned to the ranch. His surprise and happiness were no less genuine than those of the Waziri. With the chief and warriors he sat for hours at the feet of the Big Bwana, listening to an account of the strange land of Pal-ul-don and the adventures that had befallen the three during Lady Greystoke's captivity there, and with the Waziri he marveled at the queer pets the ape-man had brought back with him. That Tarzan might have fancied a mongrel native cur was strange enough, but that he should have adopted a cub of his hereditary enemies, Numa and Sabor, seemed beyond all belief. And equally surprising to them all was the manner of Tarzan's education of the cub.

The golden lion and his foster mother occupied a corner of the ape-man's bedroom, and many was the hour each day that he spent in training and educating the little spotted, yellow ball—all playfulness and affection now, but one day to grow into a great, savage beast of prey.

As the days passed and the golden lion grew, Tarzan taught it many tricks—to fetch and carry, to lie motionless in hiding at his almost inaudible word of command, to move from point to point as he indicated, to hunt for hidden things by scent and to retrieve them, and when meat was added to its diet he fed it always in a way that brought grim smiles

to the savage lips of the Waziri warriors, for Tarzan had built for him a dummy in the semblance of a man and the meat that the lion was to eat was fastened always at the throat of the dummy. Never did the manner of feeding vary. At a word from the ape-man the golden lion would crouch, belly to the ground, and then Tarzan would point at the dummy and whisper the single word "kill." However hungry he might be, the lion learned never to move toward his meat until that single word had been uttered by its master; and then with a rush and a savage growl it drove straight for the flesh. While it was little it had difficulty at first in clambering up the dummy to the savory morsel fastened at the figure's throat, but as it grew older and larger it gained the objective more easily, and finally a single leap would carry it to its goal and down would go the dummy upon its back with the young lion tearing at its throat.

There was one lesson that, of all the others, was most difficult to learn and it is doubtful that any other than Tarzan of the Apes, reared by beasts, among beasts, could have overcome the savage blood-lust of the carnivore and rendered his natural instinct subservient to the will of his master. It took weeks and months of patient endeavor to accomplish this single item of the lion's education, which consisted in teaching him that at the word "fetch" he must find any indicated object and return with it to his master, even the dummy with raw meat tied at its throat, and that he must not touch the meat nor harm the dummy nor any other article that he was fetching, but place them carefully at the ape-man's feet. Afterward he learned always to be sure of his reward, which usually consisted in a double portion of the meat that he loved best.

Lady Greystoke and Korak were often interested spectators of the education of the golden lion, though the former expressed mystification as to the purpose of such elaborate training of the young cub and some misgivings as to the wisdom of the ape-man's program.

"What in the world can you do with such a brute after he is grown?" she asked. "He bids fair to be a mighty Numa. Being accustomed to men he will be utterly fearless of them, and having fed always at the throat of a dummy he will look there at the throat of living men for his food hereafter."

"He will feed only upon what I tell him to feed," replied the ape-man.

"But you do not expect him to feed always upon men?" she interrogated, laughingly.

"He will never feed upon men."

"But how can you prevent it, having taught him from cubhood always to feed upon men?"

"I am afraid, Jane, that you under-estimate the intelligence of a lion, or else I very much over-estimate it. If your theory is correct the hardest part of my work is yet before me, but if I am right it is practically complete now. However, we will experiment a bit and see which is right. We shall take Jad-bal-ja out upon the plain with us this afternoon. Game is plentiful and we shall have no difficulty in ascertaining just how much control I have over young Numa after all."

"I'll wager a hundred pounds," said Korak, laughing, "that he does just what he jolly well pleases after he gets a taste of live blood."

"You're on, my son," said the ape-man. I think I am going to show you and your mother this afternoon what you or anyone else never dreamed could be accomplished."

"Lord Greystoke, the world's premier animal trainer!" cried Lady Greystoke, and Tarzan joined them in their laughter.

"It is not animal training," said the ape-man. "The plan upon which I work would be impossible to anyone but Tarzan of the Apes. Let us take a hypothetical case to illustrate what I mean. There comes to you some creature whom you hate, whom by instinct and heredity you consider a deadly enemy. You are afraid of him. You understand no word that he speaks. Finally, by means sometimes brutal he impresses upon your mind his wishes. You may do the thing he wants, but do you do it with a spirit of unselfish loyalty? You do not—you do it under compulsion, hating the creature that forces his will upon you. At any moment that you felt it was in your power to do so, you would disobey him. You would even go further—you would turn upon him and destroy him. On the other hand, there comes to you one with whom you are familiar; he is a friend, a protector. He understands and speaks the language that you understand and speak. He has fed you, he has gained your confidence by kindness and protection, he asks you to do something for him. Do you refuse? No, you obey willingly. It is thus that the golden lion will obey me."

"As long as it suits his purpose to do so," commented Korak.

"Let me go a step farther then," said the ape-man. "Suppose that this creature, whom you love and obey, has the power to punish, even to kill you, if it is necessary so to do to enforce his commands. How then about your obedience?"

"We'll see," said Korak, "how easily the golden lion will make one hundred pounds for me."

That afternoon they set out across the plain, Jad-bal-ja following Tarzan's horse's heels. They dismounted at a little clump of trees some distance from the bungalow and from there proceeded onward warily toward a swale in which antelopes were usually to be found, moving up which they came cautiously to the heavy brush that bordered the swale upon their side. There was Tarzan, Jane, and Korak, and close beside Tarzan the golden lion—four jungle hunters—and of the four Jad-bal-ja, the lion, was the least accomplished. Stealthily they crawled through the brush, scarce a leaf rustling to their passage, until at last they looked down into the swale upon a small herd of antelope grazing peacefully below. Closest to them was an old buck, and him Tarzan pointed out in some mysterious manner to Jad-bal-ja.

"Fetch him," he whispered, and the golden lion rumbled a scarce audible acknowledgment of the command.

Stealthily he worked his way through the brush. The antelopes fed on, unsuspecting. The distance separating the lion from his prey was over great for a successful charge, and so Jad-bal-ja waited, hiding in the brush, until the antelope should either graze

closer to him or turn its back toward him. No sound came from the four watching the grazing herbivora, nor did the latter give any indication of a suspicion of the nearness of danger. The old buck moved slowly closer to Jad-bal-ja. Almost imperceptibly the lion was gathering for the charge. The only noticeable movement was the twitching of his tail's tip, and then, as lightning from the sky, as an arrow from a bow, he shot from immobility to tremendous speed in an instant. He was almost upon the buck before the latter realized the proximity of danger, and then it was too late, for scarcely had the antelope wheeled than the lion rose upon its hind legs and seized it, while the balance of the herd broke into precipitate flight.

"Now," said Korak, "we shall see."

"He will bring the antelope to me," said Tarzan confidently.

The golden lion hesitated a moment, growling over the carcass of his kill. Then he seized it by the back and with his head turned to one side dragged it along the ground beside him, as he made his way slowly back toward Tarzan. Through the brush he dragged the slain antelope until he had dropped it at the feet of his master, where he stood, looking up at the face of the ape-man with an expression that could not have been construed into aught but pride in his achievement and a plea for commendation.

Tarzan stroked his head and spoke to him in a low voice, praising him, and then, drawing his hunting knife, he cut the jugular of the antelope and let the blood from the carcass. Jane and Korak stood close, watching Jad-bal-ja— what would the lion do with the smell of fresh, hot blood in his nostrils? He sniffed at it and growled, and with bared fangs he eyed the three wickedly. The ape-man pushed him away with his open palm and the lion growled again angrily and snapped at him.

Quick is Numa, quick is Bara, the deer, but Tarzan of the Apes is lightning. So swiftly did he strike, and so heavily, that Jad-bal-ja was falling on his back almost in the very instant that he had growled at his master. Swiftly he came to his feet again and the two stood facing one another.

"Down!" commanded the ape-man. "Lie down, Jad-bal-ja!" His voice was low and firm. The lion hesitated but for an instant, and then lay down as Tarzan of the Apes had taught him to do at the word of command. Tarzan turned and lifted the carcass of the antelope to his shoulder.

"Come," he said to Jad-bal-ja. "Heel!" and without another glance at the carnivore he moved off toward the horses.

"I might have known it," said Korak, with a laugh, "and saved my hundred pounds."

"Of course you might have known it," said his mother.

## Chapter 3

### A MEETING OF MYSTERY

A rather attractive-looking, though over-dressed, young woman was dining in a second-rate chop-house in London. She was noticeable, not so much for her fine figure and coarsely beautiful face as for the size and appearance of her companion, a large, well-proportioned man in the mid-twenties, with such a tremendous beard that it gave him the appearance of hiding in ambush. He stood fully three inches over six feet. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, and his hips narrow. His physique, his carriage, everything about him, suggested indubitably the trained athlete.

The two were in close conversation, a conversation that occasionally gave every evidence of bordering upon heated argument.

"I tell you," said the man, "that I do not see what we need of the others. Why should they share with us—why divide into six portions that which you and I might have alone?"

"It takes money to carry the plan through," she replied, "and neither you nor I have any money. They have it and they will back us with it—me for my knowledge and you for your appearance and your strength. They searched for you, Esteban, for two years, and, now that they have found you, I should not care to be in your shoes if you betrayed them. They would just as soon slit your throat as not, Esteban, if they no more than thought they couldn't use you, now that you have all the details of their plan. But if you should try to take all the profit from them—"

She paused, shrugging her shoulders. "No, my dear, I love life too well to join you in any such conspiracy as that."

But I tell you, Flora, we ought to get more out of it than they want to give. You furnish all the knowledge and I take all the risk—why shouldn't we have more than a sixth apiece?"

"Talk to them yourself, then, Esteban," said the girl, with a shrug, "but if you will take my advice you will be satisfied with what you are offered. Not only have I the information, without which they can do nothing, but I found you into the bargain, yet I do not ask it all—I shall be perfectly satisfied with one-sixth, and I can assure you that if you do not muddle the thing, one-sixth of what you bring out will be enough for any one of us for the rest of his natural life."

The man did not seem convinced, and the young woman had a feeling that he would bear watching. Really, she knew very little about him, and had seen him in person only a few times since her first discovery of him some two months before. upon the screen of a London cinema house in a spectacular feature in which he had played the role of a Roman soldier of the Pretorian Guard.

Here his heroic size and perfect physique had alone entitled him to consideration, for his part was a minor one, and doubtless of all the thousands who saw him upon the

silver sheet Flora Hawkes was the only one who took more than a passing interest in him, and her interest was aroused, not by his histrionic ability, but rather because for some two years she and her confederates had been searching for such a type as Esteban Miranda so admirably represented. To find him in the flesh bade fair to prove difficult of accomplishment, but after a month of seemingly fruitless searching she finally discovered him among a score of extra men at the studio of one of London's lesser producing companies. She needed no other credentials than her good looks to form his acquaintance, and while that was ripening into intimacy she made no mention to him of the real purpose of her association with him.

That he was a Spaniard and apparently of good family was evident to her, and that he was unscrupulous was to be guessed by the celerity with which he agreed to take part in the shady transaction that had been conceived in the mind of Flora Hawkes, and the details of which had been perfected by her and her four confederates. So, therefore, knowing that he was unscrupulous, she was aware that every precaution must be taken to prevent him taking advantage of the knowledge of their plan that he must one day have in detail, the key to which she, up to the present moment, had kept entirely to herself, not even confiding it to any one of her four other confederates.

They sat for a moment in silence, toying with the empty glasses from which they had been drinking. Presently she looked up to find his gaze fixed upon her and an expression in his eyes that even a less sophisticated woman than Flora Hawkes might readily have interpreted.

"You can make me do anything you want, Flora," he said, "for when I am with you I forget the gold, and think only of that other reward which you continually deny me, but which one day I shall win."

"Love and business do not mix well," replied the girl. "Wait until you have succeeded in this work, Esteban, and then we may talk of love."

"You do not love me," he whispered, hoarsely. "I know—I have seen—that each of the others loves you. That is why I could hate them. And if I thought that you loved one of them, I could cut his heart out. Sometimes I have thought that you did—first one of them and then another. You are too familiar with them, Flora. I have seen John Peebles squeeze your hand when he thought no one was looking, and when you dance with Dick Throck he holds you too close and you dance cheek to cheek. I tell you I do not like it, Flora, and one of these days I shall forget all about the gold and think only of you, and then something will happen and there will not be so many to divide the ingots that I shall bring back from Africa. And Bluber and Kraski are almost as bad; perhaps Kraski is the worst of all, for he is a good-looking devil and I do not like the way in which you cast sheep's eyes at him."

The fire of growing anger was leaping to the girl's eyes. With an angry gesture she silenced him.

"What business is it of yours, Senor Miranda, who I choose for my friends, or how I treat them or how they treat me? I will have you understand that I have known these men for

years, while I have known you for but a few weeks, and if any has a right to dictate my behavior, which, thank God, none has, it would be one of them rather than you."

His eyes blazed angrily.

"It is as I thought!" he cried. "You love one of them." He half rose from the table and leaned across it toward her, menacingly. "Just let me find out which one it is and I will cut him into pieces!"

He ran his fingers through his long, black hair until it stood up on end like the mane of an angry lion. His eyes were blazing with a light that sent a chill of dread through the girl's heart. He appeared a man temporarily bereft of reason—if he were not a maniac he most certainly looked one, and the girl was afraid and realized that she must placate him.

"Come, come, Esteban," she whispered softly, there is no need for working yourself into a towering rage over nothing. I have not said that I loved one of these, nor have I said that I do not love you, but I am not used to being wooed in such fashion. Perhaps your Spanish señoritas like it, but I am an English girl and if you love me treat me as an English lover would treat me.

"You have not said that you loved one of these others—no, but on the other hand you have not said that you do not love one of them—tell me, Flora, which one of them is it that you love?"

His eyes were still blazing, and his great frame trembling with suppressed passion.

"I do not love any of them, Esteban," she replied, "nor, as yet, do I love you. But I could, Esteban, that much I will tell you. I could love you, Esteban, as I could never love another, but I shall not permit myself to do so until after you have returned and we are free to live where and how we like. Then, maybe—but, even so, I do not promise."

"You had better promise," he said, sullenly, though evidently somewhat mollified. "You had better promise, Flora, for I care nothing for the gold if I may not have you also."

"Hush," she cautioned, "here they come now, and it is about time; they are fully a half-hour late."

The man turned his eyes in the direction of her gaze, and the two sat watching the approach of four men who had just entered the chop-house. Two of them were evidently Englishmen—big, meaty fellows of the middle class, who looked what they really were, former pugilists; the third, Adolph Bluber, was a short, fat German, with a round, red face and a bull neck; the other, the youngest of the four, was by far the best looking. His smooth face, clear complexion, and large dark eyes might of themselves have proven sufficient grounds for Miranda's jealousy, but supplementing these were a mop of wavy, brown hair, the figure of a Greek god and the grace of a Russian dancer, which, in truth, was what Carl Kraski was when he chose to be other than a rogue.

The girl greeted the four pleasantly, while the Spaniard vouchsafed them but a single, surly nod, as they found chairs and seated themselves at the table.



"Hale!" cried Peebles, pounding the table to attract the attention of a waiter, "let us 'ave hale."

The suggestion met with unanimous approval, and as they waited for their drink they spoke casually of unimportant things; the heat, the circumstance that had delayed them, the trivial occurrences since they had last met; throughout which Esteban sat in sullen silence, but after the waiter had returned and they drank to Flora, with which ceremony it had long been their custom to signalize each gathering, they got down to business.

"Now," cried Peebles, pounding the table with his meaty fist, "'ere we are, and that's that! We 'ave everything, Flora—the plans, the money, Senor Miranda—and are jolly well ready, old dear, for your part of it.

"How much money have you?" asked Flora. "It is going to take a lot of money, and there is no use starting unless you have plenty to carry on with."

Peebles turned to Bluber. "There," he said, pointing a pudgy finger at him, "is the bloomin' treasurer. 'E can tell you 'ow much we 'ave, the fat rascal of a Dutchman."

Bluber smiled an oily smile and rubbed his fat palms together. "Vell," he said, "how much you t'ink, Miss Flora, ve should have?"

"Not less than two thousand pounds to be on the safe side," she replied quickly.

"Oi! Oi!" exclaimed Bluber. "But dot is a lot of money— two t'ousand pounds. Oi! Oi!"

The girl made a gesture of disgust. "I told you in the first place that I wouldn't have anything to do with a bunch of cheap screws, and that until you had enough money to carry the thing out properly I would not give you the maps and directions, without which you cannot hope to reach the vaults, where there is stored enough gold to buy this whole, tight, little island if half that what I have heard them say about it is true. You can go along and spend your own money, but you've got to show me that you have at least two thousand pounds to spend before I give up the information that will make you the richest men in the world."

"The blighter's got the money," growled Throck. "Blime if I know what he's beefin' about."

"He can't help it," growled the Russian, "it's a racial characteristic; Bluber would try to jew down the marriage license clerk if he were going to get married."

"Oh, vell," sighed Bluber, "for vy should we spend more money than is necessary? If ve can do it for vone t'ousand pounds so much the better."

"Certainly," snapped the girl, "and if it don't take but one thousand, that is all that you will have to spend, but you've got to have the two thousand in case of emergencies, and from what I have seen of that country you are likely to run up against more emergencies than anything else."

"Oi! Oi!" cried Bluber.

"'E's got the money all right," said Peebles, "now let's get busy."

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