

TARZAN THE MIGHTY

Novelized by ARTHUR B. REEVE,
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EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
Author of TARZAN OF THE APES, THE CAVE GIRL, etc.

Chapter VIII MOCK MARRIAGE (Continued)

Mary's terror changed suddenly to hope as she strained at her chains. Here was Tarzan!

With his superhuman strength he wrenched one of the chains loose, and started to wrench the other. It did not snap so easily.

From the pinnacle of elation John had been suddenly cast to the depth of murderous anger as one of the priests, recovering, staggered to warn him. In a towering rage he seized his long hunting knife, passed another to the priest, and on stealthy, cat-like feet they entered another, secret passage back of the ceremonial chamber followed by the other priest, now also armed with a knife.

"Hurry, Tarzan," urged Bobby. "They will be here!"

Tarzan tore again at the refractory leg iron.

From a secret panel in the rock wall back of him emerged three shadowy silent figures. Three long, murderous knives were raised in the darkness ready to strike without even a flash of warning.

Chapter IX

BLACK JOHN'S REVENGE

Suddenly Tarzan sensed the peril behind him. He swung around as the last chain snapped and released Mary, just in time to catch in his grip of steel the arm that was descending with the dagger, in the dark. Single handed Tarzan was more than a match for his attackers and for the others, also, that Black John had hastily mustered in the emergency.

From a distance the venerable old Patriarch of the Lost Tribe was watching with troubled mien as he saw Tarzan vanquish one after another of the strongest young men of the tribe. His fear changed to a frown as he caught sight of Black John himself slinking off into the jungle. What was to become of

them with this new terror loose in the very holy of holies within the stockade? Hitherto they had relied on the craft and cunning of Black John and his so-called "magic." What now?

The Patriarch knew only one law of life. That was to bow to the rulership of the strongest. And had not Tarzan proved himself the strongest of them all? Even now he was giving the terrible jungle cry. A few moments and even the beasts would be there, doing his bidding.

Quickly the Patriarch approached Mary. He bowed low. "Oh, White Princess! Beg Tarzan the Mighty to rule over us—who is king of the Jungle,—lest we perish!"

Mary had always felt a sneaking sympathy for the old man under the tyranny of Black John. She took his arm and led him toward Tarzan.

"Don't strike, Tarzan!" she pleaded as she saw him at once ready to defend himself by attacking even this newcomer. "He wants you to be their Chief—to take the place of Black John!"

At first the mere idea was repugnant to Tarzan. But Mary coaxed. And what Mary wanted was quite a different story. He began to relent, then to be interested, finally to consider as the other members of the tribe gathered about. With aboriginal eagerness they were ready to yield fealty to the new overlord. Tarzan bowed to the honor of the inevitable, and elated the Patriarch turned to address the tribe swearing them to loyalty to the new leader.

There was but one dissenter and he was not in the open. From a hiding place in the tropical tangle Black John listened as he heard himself deposed and Tarzan elevated in his place, listened long enough to realize that it was unsafe for him in that neighborhood, then

turned swearing to himself a dark oath to get revenge.

At once the village was in great excitement. It was an event of major importance to have a new chief and it called for a weird and elaborate ceremony of installation. Preparations were at once begun for it and the natives threw themselves into it with a will for it was indeed a great thing to have Tarzan fighting for them, not against them.

Thus it was that when darkness settled down on the village that night the Patriarch and the entire tribe were assembled about the central fire with flares, the priests in weird costumes and the dancers outdoing themselves to make honor to Tarzan.

It was more than even Bobby could stand after the wild events of the day. He had seen nearly all of the ceremony and his head was nodding so that he was almost asleep. Mary carried him to the cabin and put him on his pallet of straw. It had been a great night for Mary, too. Every honor that was showered on Tarzan was like the gift of a jewel to her. She was tired but she was not going to miss a thing. She covered up Bobby, then thought that in the heat of the night he might need a drink. She took a hollow gourd to fill at the spring outside.

Suddenly a hand, a strangely familiar hand, stole through a hole in the wall of the hut, then another was clapped over Bobby's mouth as he was jerked through the opening of the thatch, and an instant later the devilish Black John slunk back into the shadows of the jungle making his way as fast as he could with his burden.

Across on the other side of the jungle fastness at last Black John stumbled into his secret camp which he had always kept ready against some rebellious outbreak in the tribe. There he had built himself a lean-to and there now he flung the tired Bobby whom he had carried off and then tired out by his forced haste. Bobby was too sleepy to do otherwise than heed Black John's threat to lie down, for it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have left the boy outside the circle of the firelight a prey to the strange night-provokers of the jungle.

For a moment Black John listened for sounds of pursuit. Hearing none he also settled down. His quick mind was going over his future course. What should it be? Back again to his life as a beach-comber, searching the sea eagerly for a sign of a ship? He sat bolt

upright. Those papers he had seized from Mary! An evil smile overspread his face instantly. He reached into his pocket and pulled them out, scanning them eagerly, in the firelight. Here, then, was his plan, his way to turn defeat into a blazing success. Just let a ship appear and answer his signal and he would be in touch with civilization. That meant that he might use the very proofs of Tarzan's heritage for his own gain. He would be Lord Greystoke, heir to the title and the estates! He fell asleep dreaming of it.

Men of Black John's calibre always fall because they seem never to give their opponents credit for having any sense. They always underestimate them. Any anyone that underestimated Bobby was bound to lose out sooner or later.

Bobby had not been lying long before he began to watch furtively between the slits of almost closed eyes. As he saw Black John lose interest in watching him and become absorbed in the papers he had stolen from Mary, Bobby's boyish mind put the situation together well enough to realize that there were compensations for his kidnapping. He restrained himself until Black

John was snoring deeply and regularly. And as he did so his own fatigue departed and he felt refreshed with the night air.

At last Bobby decided that the time was ripe to carry out the plan he had evolved. He crept stealthily from the lean-to toward the man asleep by the dying fire with the papers still clutched in his hands. Carefully Bobby loosened them from the almost supine grip now and extracted them. Then as fast as ever he could Bobby backed away from the sleeping villain.

Unfortunately Bobby did not have eyes in the back of his head. He backed right into a bush of brambles, and the long thorns tore his clothes smartly as he repressed his own exclamation of pain and side-stepped. Luck was against him. He toppled over a jar that was in the dark shadow of the bush, smashing it.

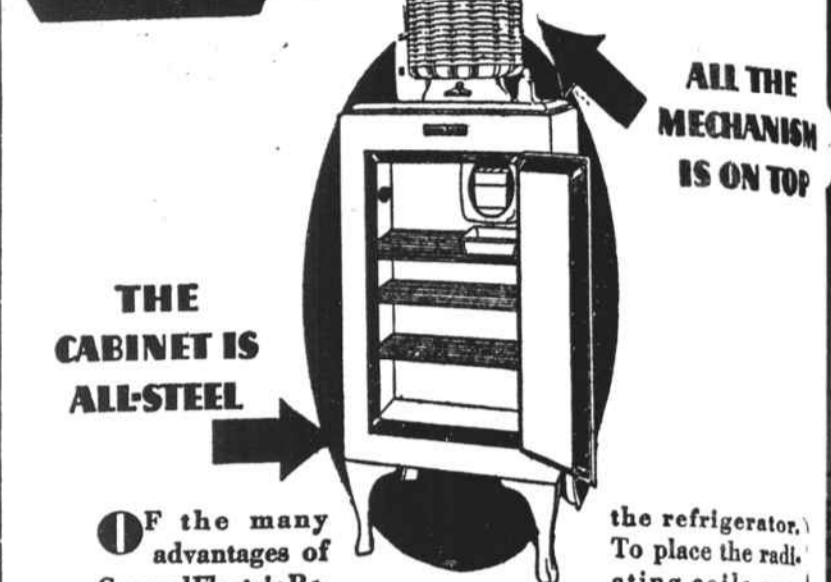
Instantly the alert senses of Black John caught the sound. He roused from his sleep, sprang to his feet, rubbing his eyes which adjusted themselves to the darkness like an

animal's. His first instinct was about the boy—and sure enough he had fled from the lean-to. He could hear him, too, crashing through the jungle in his frightened haste. It might be death to Bobby in the night. Black John cared nothing for that. If Bobby were dead he would lose his hold on Mary, Bobby was Black John's hostage to fate. He hallooed after the boy and pursued, now trying to frighten him against running into jungle perils, now seeking to coax him back.
(To be continued)

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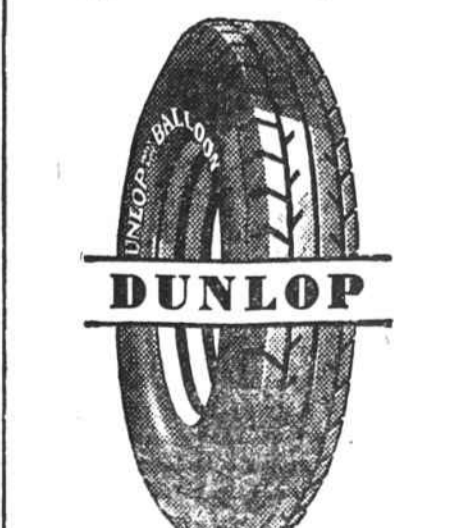
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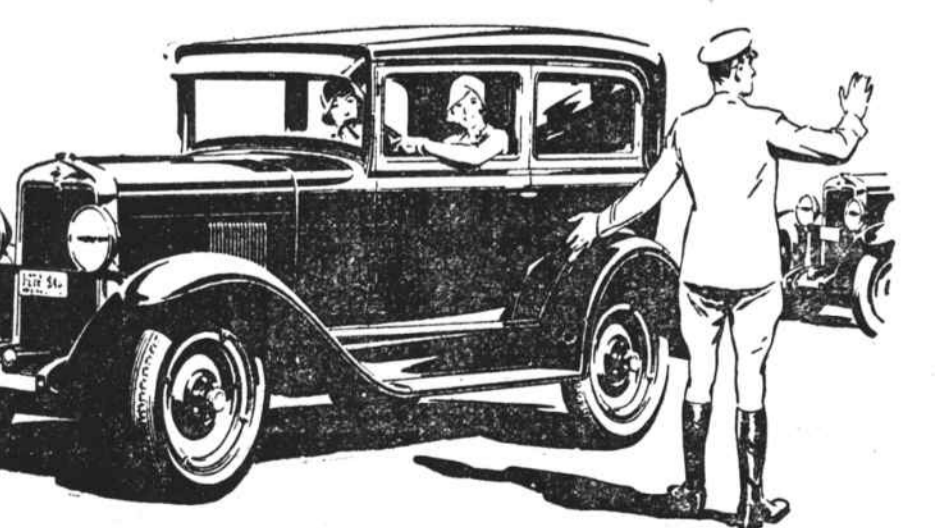
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