

THE RETURN OF TARZAN

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS AUTHOR OF "TARZAN OF THE APES"

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CHAPTER XVII, THE LOTTERY OF DEATH

JANE Porter had been the first of those who in the lifeboat to awaken the morning after the wreck of the Lady Alice.

The other members of the party were asleep upon the thwart or huddled in cramped positions in the bottom of the boat.

When the girl had realized that they had become separated from the other boats she was filled with alarm.

The sense of utter loneliness and helplessness which the vast expanse of deserted ocean aroused in her was so depressing that, from the first, contemplation of the future held but the slightest ray of promise for her.

Presently Clayton awoke. It was several minutes before he could gather his senses sufficiently to realize where he was, or recall the disaster of the previous night.

"Where can they be?" he cried. "They cannot have gone down, for there has been no sea, and they were afloat after the yacht sank—I saw them all."

He awoke the other members of the party, and explained their plight as best he could. "Just as the boats were scattered, sir," said one of the sailors.

"They are all provisioned, so that they do not need each other on that score, and should a storm blow up they could be of service to one another even if they were together, but scattered about the ocean there is a much better chance that one at least will be picked up, and then a search will be made for the others."

"We'll all get together there would be but one chance of rescue, where now there may be four."

"I saw the wisdom of his philosophy, and was cheered by it, but the joy was short-lived, for when it was decided that they should row steadily toward the east and the continent, it was discovered that the sailors who had been the only ones with which the boat had been provided had fallen asleep at their work, and allowed both to slip into the sea, nor were they in sight anywhere upon the water."

"During the angry words and recriminations which followed the sailors nearly came to blows, but Clayton succeeded in quieting them; though a moment later Monsieur Thurau almost precipitated another row by making a nasty remark about the stupidity of all Englishmen, and especially English sailors."

"Come, come, master," spoke up one of the men, Tompkins, who had not been part in the altercation. "shootin' hof' hour blunder mugs won't get us nothin'."

"Fetch it yourself," retorted Wilson sullenly. "I ain't a-akin no orders from no furriner—no a-akin captain o' this ship yet."

"That's not a bad idea," said Monsieur Thurau, and then, turning to the third sailor, Wilson, he said: "Fetch one of these tin aff, my good man."

"Fetch it yourself," retorted Wilson sullenly. "I ain't a-akin no orders from no furriner—no a-akin captain o' this ship yet."

"The result was that Clayton himself had to get the tin, and then another angry altercation ensued when one of the sailors accused Clayton and Monsieur Thurau of conspiring to control the provisions so that they could have the lion's share."

"Some one should take command of this boat," spoke up Jane Porter, thoroughly disgusted with the disagreeable wrangling that had marked the very opening of a forced companionship that might last for many days.

"Let me be the one," said Clayton, "I'll be alone in a frail boat on the Atlantic, without having the added misery and danger of constant bickering and brawling among the members of our party. You men should elect a leader, and then abide by his decisions in all matters. There is a greater need for strict discipline here, than there is upon a well-ordered ship."

"She had hoped before she voiced her sentiments that it would not be necessary for her to enter into the transaction at all, for she believed that Clayton was amply capable to cope with every emergency, but she had to admit that so far at least he had shown no greater promise of successfully handling the situation than any of the others, though he had at least refrained from adding in any way to the unpleasantness, even going so far as to give up the tin to the sailors when they objected to its being opened by him."

"The girls' words temporarily quieted the men, and finally it was decided that the two kegs of water and the four tin cans of food should be divided into two parts, one-half going forward to the two parts, or to do with as they saw best, and the balance left to the three passengers."

Thus was the little company divided into two camps, and when the provisions had been apportioned each immediately set to work to open and distribute food and water. The sailors were the first to get their share, and when the provisions had been apportioned each immediately set to work to open and distribute food and water.

"Well, thank Gawd it wasn't the water," cried Tompkins, "it's easier to get along without food than it is without water. We can heat our shoes if worse comes to worst, but we couldn't drink 'em."

hole in one of the water kegs, and as Spider held a tin cup he tilted the keg to pour a draft of the precious fluid. A thin stream of blackish, dry particles filtered slowly through the tiny aperture into the bottom of the cup. With a grating Wilson dropped the keg, and sat staring at the dry stuff in the cup, speechless with shock.

"Coal oil and gunpowder!" cried Monsieur Thurau. "Sapristi! What a diet for shipwrecked mariners!"

With the full knowledge that there was neither food nor water on board, the pangs of hunger and thirst became immediately aggravated, and so on the first day of their tragic adventure real suffering commenced in grim earnest, and the full horrors of shipwreck were upon them.

"As the days passed conditions became horrible. Aching eyes scanned the horizon day and night until the weak and weary watchers would sink exhausted in dream-disturbed slumber a moment's respite from the horrors of the waking reality."

"The sailors, goaded by the remorseless pangs of hunger, had eaten their leather belts, their shoes, the sweatbands from their caps, although both Clayton and Monsieur Thurau had done their best to convince them that these would only add to the suffering they were enduring."

Weak and hopeless, the entire party lay beneath the pitiless tropic sun, with parched lips and swollen tongues, waiting for the death they were beginning to expect. "You yet land may be sighted or a ship appear in time," said one of the men to draw this date first from beneath a piece of cloth lying on the floor.

"I shall have nothing to do with any such diabolical plan," muttered Clayton; "you yet land may be sighted or a ship appear in time," said one of the men to draw this date first from beneath a piece of cloth lying on the floor.

"You will do as the majority decide, or you will be the first to withdraw the formality of drawing lots," said Monsieur Thurau, threateningly. "Come, let us vote on the plan; I for one am in favor of it. How about you, Spider?"

"It is the will of the majority," announced Monsieur Thurau, "and now let us lose no time in drawing lots. It is as fair for one as for another. That three may live, one of us must die perhaps a few hours sooner than otherwise."

Then he began his preparations for the lottery of death, while Jane Porter sat wide-eyed and horrified at thought of the thing that she was about to witness. Monsieur Thurau spread his coat upon the bottom of the boat, and then from a handful of money he selected six franc pieces. The other two men bent close above him as he inspected them. Finally he handed them all to Clayton.

"Look at them carefully," he said. "The oldest date is eighteen-seventy-five, and there is only one of that year."

Clayton and the sailor inspected each coin. To them there seemed not the slightest difference that could be detected other than the dates. They were satisfied. Had they known that Monsieur Thurau's past experience as a card sharp had trained his sense of touch to go fine a point that he could almost differentiate between cards by the mere feel of them, they would scarcely have felt that the plan was so entirely fair. To the 1875 piece was a hair thinner than the other coins, but neither Clayton nor Spider could have detected it without the aid of a micrometer.

"In what order shall we draw?" asked Monsieur Thurau, knowing from past experience that the majority of men always prefer last chance in a lottery when the single prize is some distasteful thing—there is always the chance and the hope that another will draw it first. He preferred to draw first if the drawing should happen to require a second drawing beneath the coat.

"Let me draw, but let me draw last," he graciously offered to take the first chance himself. His hand was under the coat for but a moment, yet those quick, deft fingers had felt of each coin, and found and discarded the fatal piece. When he brought forth his hand it contained a 1888 franc piece. Then Clayton drew. Jane Porter leaned forward with the hope that another would draw it first, as the hand of the man she was to marry groped about beneath the coat. Presently he withdrew it, a franc piece lying in the palm. For an instant he dared not look, but Monsieur Thurau, who had leaned nearer to see the date, exclaimed that he was safe.

Jane Porter sank weak and trembling against the side of the boat. She felt sick and dizzy. And now, if Spider should not draw the 1875 piece she must endure the whole horrid thing again.

The sailor already had his hand beneath the coat. Great beads of sweat were standing upon his forehead. He trembled as though with a fit of ague. Aloud he cursed himself for having taken the last draw, for now his chances for escape were but three to one, whereas Monsieur Thurau's had been five to one, and Clayton's four to one.

The Russian was very patient, and did not hurry the man, for he knew that the piece was quite safe when the 1875 piece came out this time or not. Whether the sailor withdrew his hand and looked at the piece of money within, he dropped faintly to the bottom, or whether Clayton and Monsieur Thurau hastened weakly to examine the coin, which had rolled from the man's hand and lay beside him, it was not dated 1875. The reaction from the stress of fear he had been in had overcome Spider quite as effectively as though he had drawn the fated piece.

But now the whole proceeding went on through again. Once more the Russian drew forth a harmless coin. Jane Porter closed her eyes as Clayton reached beneath the coat. Spider bent, wide-eyed, for whatever luck was Clayton's on this last draw, the opposite would be Spider's.

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