

A JUNGLE JOKE

Tarzan Changes Himself From a Man to a Lion and Saves Numa

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

TIME seldom hung heavily upon Tarzan's hands. Even where there is sameness there cannot be monotony if most of the sameness consists in dodging death first in one form and then in another; in inflicting death upon others. There is a spice to such an existence; but even this Tarzan of the Apes varied in activities of his own invention.

He was full grown now, with the grace of a Greek god and the thews of a bull, and, by all the tenets of apedom should have been sullen, morose and brooding; but he was not. His spirits seemed not to age at all—he was still a playful child, much to the discomfiture of his fellow-apes. They could not understand him or his ways, for with maturity they quickly forgot their youth and its pastimes.

Nor could Tarzan quite understand them. It seemed strange to him that a few moons since, he had roped Taug about an ankle and dragged him screaming through the tall jungle grasses, and then rolled and tumbled in good-natured mimic battle when the young ape had freed himself, and that today when he had come up behind the same Taug and pulled him over backward upon the turf instead of the playful young ape, a great, snarling beast had whirled and leaped for his throat.

Easily Tarzan eluded the charge and quickly Taug's anger vanished, though it was not replaced with playfulness; yet the ape-man realized that Taug was not amused nor was he amusing. The big bull ape seemed to have lost whatever sense of humor he once may have possessed. With a grunt of disappointment, young Lord Greystroke turned to other fields of endeavor. A strand of black hair fell across one eye. He brushed it aside with the palm of a hand and a toss of his head. It suggested something to do, so he sought his quiver which lay cached in the hollow bole of a lightning-riven tree. Removing the arrows he turned the quiver upside down, emptying upon the ground the contents of its bottom—his few treasures. Among them was a flat bit of stone and a shell which he had picked up from the bench near his father's cabin.

With great care he rubbed the edge of the shell back and forth upon the flat stone until the soft edge was quite fine and sharp. He worked much as a barber does who hones a razor, and with every evidence of similar practice; but his proficiency was the result of years of painstaking effort. Unaided he had worked out a method of his own for putting an edge upon the shell—he even tested it with the ball of his thumb—and when it met with his approval he grasped a wisp of the hair which fell across his eyes, grasped it between the thumb and first finger of his left hand and sawed upon it with the sharpened shell until it was severed. All around his head he went until his black shock was rudely bobbed with a ragged bang in front. For the appearance of it he cared nothing; but in the matter of safety and comfort it meant everything. A lock of hair falling in one's eyes at the wrong moment might mean all the difference between life and death, while straggly strands, hanging down one's back were most uncomfortable, especially when wet with dew or rain or perspiration.

As Tarzan labored at his tonsorial task, his active mind was busy with many things. He recalled his recent battle with Bolgani, the gorilla, the wounds of which were but just healed. He pondered the strange sleep adventures of his first dreams, and he smiled at the painful outcome of his last practical joke upon the tribe, when, dressed in the hide of Numa, the lion, he had come roaring upon them, only to be leaped upon and almost killed by the great bulls whom he had taught how to defend themselves from an attack of their ancient enemy.

His hair lopped off to his entire satisfaction, and seeing no possibility of pleasure in the company of the tribe, Tarzan swung leisurely into the trees and set off in the direction of his cabin; but when part way there his attention was attracted by a strong scent spoor coming from the north. It was the scent of the Gomangani.

Curiosity, the best-developed, common heritage of man and ape, always prompted Tarzan to investigate where the Gomangani were concerned. There was that about them which aroused his imagination. Possibly it was because of the diversity of their activities and interests. The apes lived to eat and sleep and propagate. The same was true of all the other denizens of the jungle, save the Gomangani.

These black fellows danced and sang, scratched around in the earth from which they had cleared the trees and underbrush; they watched things grow, and when they had ripened, they cut them down and put them in straw-thatched huts. They made bows and spears and arrows, poison, cooking pots, things of metal to wear around their arms and legs. If it hadn't been for their black faces, their hideously disfigured features, and the fact that

one of them had slain Kala, Tarzan might have wished to be one of them. At least he sometimes thought so, but always at the thought there rose within him a strange revulsion of feeling, which he could not interpret or understand—he simply knew that he hated the Gomangani, and that he would rather be Histah, the snake, than one of these.

But their ways were interesting, and Tarzan never tired of spying upon them, and from them he learned much more than he realized, though always his principal thought was of some new way in which he could render their lives miserable. The baiting of the blacks was Tarzan's chief diversion.

Tarzan realized now that the blacks were very near and that there were many of them, so he went silently and with great caution. Noiselessly he moved through the lush grasses of the open spaces, and where the forest was dense, swung from one swaying branch to another, or leaped lightly over tangled masses of fallen trees where there was no way through the lower terraces, and the ground was choked and impassable.

And so presently he came within sight of the black warriors of Mbonga, the chief. They were engaged in a pursuit with which Tarzan was more or less familiar, having watched them at it upon other occasions. They were placing and baiting a trap for Numa, the lion. In a cage upon wheels they were tying a kid, so fastening it that when Numa seized the unfortunate creature, the door of the cage would drop behind him, making him a prisoner.

These things the blacks had learned in their old home, before they escaped through the untracked jungle to their new village. Formerly they had dwelt in the Belgian Congo until the cruelties of their heartless oppressors had driven them to seek the safety of unexplored solitudes beyond the boundaries of Leopold's domain.

In their old life they often had trapped animals for the agents of European dealers, and had learned from them certain tricks, such as this one, which permitted them to capture even Numa without injuring him, and to transport him in safety and with comparative ease to their village.

No longer was there a white market for their savage wares; but there was still a sufficient incentive for the taking of Numa—alive. First was the necessity for riding the jungle of man-eaters, and it was only after depredations by these grim and terrible scourges, that a lion hunt was organized. Secondly was the excuse for an orgy of celebration was the hunt successful, and the fact that such fetes were rendered doubly pleasurable by the presence of a live creature that might be put to death by torture.

Tarzan had witnessed these cruel rites in the past. Being himself more savage than the savage warriors of the Gomangani, he was not so shocked by the cruelty of them as he should have been, yet they did shock him. He could not understand the strange feeling of revulsion which possessed him at such times. He had no love for Numa, the lion, yet he bristled with rage when the blacks inflicted upon his enemy such indignities and cruelties as only the mind of the one creature molded in the image of God can conceive.

Upon two occasions he had freed Numa from the trap before the blacks had returned to discover the success or failure of their venture. He would do the same today—he decided immediately he realized the nature of their intentions.

Leaving the trap in the center of a broad elephant trail near the drinking hole, the warriors turned back toward their village. On the morrow they would come again. Tarzan looked after them, upon his lips an unconscious sneer—the heritage of unguessed caste. He saw them file along the broad trail, beneath the overhanging verdure of leafy branch and looped and festooned creepers, brushing ebon shoulders against gorgeous blooms which inscrutable Nature has seen fit to lavish most profusely farthest from the eye of man.

As Tarzan watched, through narrowed lids, the last of the warriors disappear beyond a turn in the trail, his expression altered to the urge of a newborn thought. A slow, grim smile touched his lips. He looked down upon the frightened, bleeding kid, advertising, in its fear and its innocence, its presence and its helplessness.

Dropping to the ground, Tarzan approached the trap and entered. Without disturbing the fiber cord, which was adjusted to drop the door at the proper time, he loosened the living bait, tucked it under an arm and stepped out of the cage.

With his hunting knife he quieted the frightened animal, severing its jugular; then he dragged it, bleeding, along the trail down to the drinking hole, the half smile persisting upon his ordinarily grave face. At the water's edge the ape-man stooped and with hunting knife and quick strong fingers deftly removed the dead kid's viscera. Scraping a hole in the mud, he buried these parts which he did not eat, and swinging the body to his shoulder took to the trees.

For a short distance he pursued his way in the wake of the black warriors, coming down presently to bury the meat of his kill where it would be safe from the depredations of Dango, the hyena, or the other

meat-eating beasts and birds of the jungle. He was hungry. Had he been all beast he would have eaten; but his man-mind could entertain urges even more potent than those of the belly, and now he was concerned with an idea which kept a smile upon his lips and his eyes sparkling in anticipation. An idea, it was, which permitted him to forget that he was hungry.

The meat safely cached, Tarzan trotted along the elephant trail after the Gomangani. Two or three miles from the cage he overtook them and then he swung into the trees and followed above and behind them—waiting his chance.

Among the blacks was Rabba Kega, the witch-doctor. Tarzan hated them all; but Rabba Kega he especially hated. As the blacks filed along the winding path, Rabba Kega, being lazy, dropped behind. This Tarzan noted, and it filled him with satisfaction—his being radiated a grim and terrible content. Like an angel of death he hovered above the unsuspecting black.

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hole between two rocks to escape the tyrannosaur six million years ago. The morning following the disappearance of Rabba Kega, the warriors set out with Mbonga, the chief, to examine the trap they had set for Numa. Long before they reached the cage, they heard the roaring of a great lion and guessed that they had made a successful bag, so it was with shouts of joy that they approached the spot where they should find their captive.

Yes! there he was, a great, magnificent specimen—a huge, black-maned lion. The warriors were frantic with delight. They leaped into the air and uttered savage cries—hoarse victory cries, and then they came closer, and the cries died upon their lips, and their eyes went wide around their irises, and their pendulous lower lips drooped with their drooping jaws. They drew back in terror at the sight within the cage—the mauled and mutilated corpse of what had, yesterday, been Rabba Kega, the witch-doctor.

The captured lion had been too angry and frightened to feed upon the body of his kill; but he had vented upon it much of his rage, until it was a frightful thing to behold. From his perch in a near-by tree Tarzan of the Apes, Lord Greystroke, looked down upon the black warriors and grinned. Once again his self-pride in his ability as a practical joker asserted itself.

He had lain dormant for some time following the painful mauling he had received that time he leaped among the apes of Kerchak clothed in the skin of Numa; but this joke was a decided success. When he awoke it was dark, though a faint luminosity still tinged the western heavens. A lion moaned and coughed as it strode through the jungle toward water. It was approaching the drinking hole. Tarzan grinned sleepily, changed his position and fell asleep again.

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When the blacks of Mbonga, the chief, reached their village they discovered that Rabba Kega was not among them. When several hours had elapsed they decided that something had happened to him, and it was the hope of the majority of the tribe that whatever had happened to him might prove fatal. They did not love the witch-doctor. Love and fear seldom are playmates; but a warrior is a warrior, and so Mbonga organized a searching party. That his own grief was not unassuageable might have been gathered from the fact that he remained at home and went to sleep. The young warriors whom he sent out remained steadfast to their purpose for fully half an hour, when, unfortunately for Rabba Kega—upon so slight a thing may the fate of a man rest—a honey bird attracted the attention of the searchers and led them off for the delicious store it previously had marked down for betrayal, and Rabba Kega's doom was sealed.

When the searchers returned empty handed, Mbonga was wroth; but when he saw the great store of honey they brought with them his rage subsided. Already Tubuto, young, agile and evil-minded, with face hideously painted, was practicing the black art upon a sick infant in the fond hope of succeeding to the office and perquisites of Rabba Kega. Tonight the women of the old witch-doctor would moan and howl. Tomorrow he would be forgotten. Such is life, such is fame, such is power—in the center of the world's highest civilization, or in the depths of the black, primeval jungle. Always, everywhere, man is man, nor has he altered greatly beneath his veneer since he scurried into a

liberalized prototypes who make a business of dividing their time between the movies and the neighborhood funerals of friends and strangers—especially strangers.

From a tree overhanging the palisade, Tarzan watched all that passed within the village. He saw the frenzied women tantalizing the great lion with sticks and stones. The cruelty of the blacks toward a captive always induced in Tarzan a feeling of angry contempt for the Gomangani. Had he attempted to analyze this feeling he would have found it difficult, for during all his life he had been accustomed to sights of suffering and cruelty. He, himself, was cruel. All the beasts of the jungle were cruel; but the cruelty of the blacks was of a different order. It was the cruelty of wanton torture of the helpless, while the cruelty of Tarzan and the other beasts was the cruelty of necessity or of passion.

And just in proportion as his anger rose against the Gomangani his savage sympathy went out to Numa, the lion, for, though Numa was his lifetime enemy, there was neither bitterness nor contempt in Tarzan's sentiments toward him. In the ape-man's mind, therefore, the determination formed to thwart the blacks and liberate the lion; but he must accomplish this in some way which would cause the Gomangani the greatest chagrin and discomfiture.

As he squatted there watching the proceeding beneath him, he saw the warriors seize upon the cage once more and drag it between two huts. Tarzan knew that it would remain there now until evening, and that the blacks were planning a feast and orgy in celebration of their captive. When he saw that two warriors were placed beside the cage, and that these drove off the women and children and young men who would have eventually tortured Numa to death, he knew that the lion would be safe until he was needed for the evening's entertainment, when he would be more cruelly and scientifically tortured for the edification of the entire tribe.

Now Tarzan preferred to bait the blacks in as theatrical a manner as his fertile imagination could evolve. He had some half-formed conception of their superstitious fears and of their special dread of night, and so he decided to wait until darkness fell and the blacks partially worked to hysteria by their dancing and religious rites before he took any steps toward the freeing of Numa. In the meantime, he hoped, an idea adequate to the possibilities of the various factors at hand would occur to him. Nor was it long before one did.

They merely snarled and grumbled angrily for a moment and then resumed their feeding or their napping which he had interrupted, and he, having had his little joke, made his way to the hollow tree where he kept his treasures hid from the mischievous little man. Here he withdrew a closely rolled hide—the hide of Numa with the head on; a clever bit of primitive curing and mounting which had once been the property of the witch-doctor, Rabba Kega, until Tarzan had stolen it from the village.

With this he made his way back through the jungle toward the village of the blacks, stopping to hunt and feed upon the way, and, in the afternoon, even napping for an hour, so that it was already dusk when he entered the great tree which overhung the palisade and gave him a view of the entire village. He saw that Numa was still alive and that the guards were even dozing beside the cage. A lion is no great novelty to a black man in the lion country, and the first keen edge of their desire to worry the brute having worn off, the villagers paid little or no attention to the great cat, preferring now to wait the grand event of the night.

Nor was it long after dark before the festivities commenced. To the beating of tom-toms, a lone warrior, crouched half doubled, leaped into the firelight in the center of a great circle of other warriors, behind whom stood or squatted the women and the children. The dancer was painted and armed for the hunt and his movements and gestures suggested the search for the spoor of game. Bending low, sometimes resting for a moment on one knee, he searched the ground for signs of the quarry; again he poised, statuesque, listening. The warrior was young and lithe and graceful; he was full-muscled and arrow-straight. The firelight glistened upon his ebon body and brought out into bold relief the grotesque designs painted upon his face, breasts and abdomen.

Presently he bent low to the earth, then leaped high in air. Every line of face and body showed that he had struck the scent. Immediately he leaped toward the circle of warriors about him, telling them of his find and summoning them to the hunt. It was all in pantomime, but so truly done that even Tarzan could follow it all to the least detail.

He saw the other warriors grasp their hunting spears and leap to their feet to join in the graceful, stealthy "stalking dance." It was very interesting, but Tarzan realized that if he was to carry his design to a successful conclusion he must act quickly. He had seen these dances before and knew that after the stalk would come the game at bay and then the kill, during which Numa would be surrounded by warriors and unapproachable.

With the lion's skin under one arm the ape-man dropped to the ground in the dense shadows beneath the tree and then circled behind the huts until he came out directly in the rear of the cage, in which Numa paced nervously to and fro. The cage was now unguarded, the two warriors having left it to take their places among the other dancers.

Behind the cage Tarzan adjusted the lion's skin about him, just as he had upon that memorable occasion when the apes of Kerchak, failing to pierce his disguise, had all but slain him. Then, on hands and knees, he crept forward, emerged from between the two huts and stood a few paces back of the dusky audience, whose whole attention was centered upon the dancers before them.

Tarzan saw that the blacks had now worked themselves to a proper pitch of nervous excitement to be ripe for the lion. In a moment the ring of spectators would break at a point nearest the caged lion and the victim would be rolled into the center of the circle. It was for this moment that Tarzan waited.

At last it came. A signal was given by Mbonga, the chief, at which the women and children immediately in front of Tarzan rose and moved to one side, leaving a broad path opening toward the caged lion. At the same instant Tarzan gave voice to the low, coughing roar of an angry lion and slunk slowly forward through the open lane toward the frenzied dancers.

A woman saw him first and screamed. Instantly there was a panic in the immediate vicinity of the ape-man. The strong light from the fire fell full upon the lion head and the blacks leaped to the conclusion, as Tarzan had known they would, that their captive had escaped his cage.

With another roar Tarzan moved forward. The dancing warriors paused but an instant. They had been hunting a lion securely housed within a strong cage, and now that he was at liberty among them, an entirely different aspect was placed upon the matter. Their nerves were not attuned to this emergency. The women and children already had fled to the questionable safety of the nearest huts, and the warriors were not long in following their example, so that presently Tarzan was left in sole possession of the village street.

But not for long. Nor did he wish to be left thus long alone. It would not comport with his scheme. Presently a head peered forth from a nearby hut, and then another and another until a score or more of warriors were looking out upon him, waiting for his next move—waiting for the lion to charge or to attempt to escape from the village.

Their spears were ready in their hands against either a charge or a bolt for freedom, and then the lion

rose erect upon its hind legs, the tawny skin dropped from it and there stood revealed before them in the firelight the straight young figure of the white devil-god.

For an instant the blacks were too astonished to act. They feared this apparition fully as much as they did Numa, yet they would gladly have slain the thing could they quickly enough have gathered together their wits; but fear—and superstition and a natural mental density held them paralyzed while the ape-man stooped and gathered up the lion skin. They saw him turn then and walk back into the shadows at the far end of the village. Not until then did they gain courage to pursue him, and when they had come in force, with brandished spears and loud war cries, the quarry was gone.

Not an instant did Tarzan pause in the tree. Throwing the skin over a branch he leaped again into the village upon the opposite side of the great bole, and diving into the shadow of a hut, ran quickly to where lay the caged lion. Springing to the top of the cage he pulled upon the cord which raised the door, and a moment later a great lion in the prime of his strength and vigor leaped out into the village.

The warriors, returning from a futile search for Tarzan, saw him step into the firelight. Ah! there was the devil-god again, up to his old trick. Did he think he could twice fool the men of Mbonga, the chief, the same way in so short a time? They would show him! For long they had waited for such an opportunity to rid themselves forever of this fearsome jungle demon. As gone they rushed forward with raised spears.

The women and the children came from the huts to witness the slaying of the devil-god. The lion turned blazing eyes upon them and then swung about toward the advancing warriors.

With shouts of savage joy and triumph they came toward him, menacing him with their spears. The devil-god was theirs!

And then, with a frightful roar, Numa, the lion, charged.

The men of Mbonga, the chief, met Numa with ready spears and screams of rancor. In a solid mass of muscled ebony they waited the coming of the devil-god; yet beneath their brave exteriors lurked a haunting fear that all might not be quite well with them—that this strange creature could yet prove invulnerable to their weapons and inflict upon them full punishment for their effrontery. The charging lion was all too lifelike—they saw that in the brief instant of the charge; but beneath the tawny hide they knew was hid the soft flesh of a white man, and how could that withstand the assault of many war spears?

In their forefront stood a huge young warrior in the full arrogance of his might and his youth. Afraid? Not he! He laughed as Numa bore down upon him; he laughed and coughed his spear, setting the point for the broad breast. And then the lion was upon him. A great paw swept away the heavy war spear, splintering it as the hand of man might splinter a dry twig.

Dawn went the black, his skull crushed by another blow. And then the lion was in the midst of the warriors, clawing and tearing to right and left. Not for long did they stand their ground; but a dozen men were mauled before the others made good their escape from those frightful talons and gleaming fangs.

In terror the villagers fled hither and thither. No hut seemed a sufficiently secure asylum with Numa ranging within the palisade. From one to another fled the frightened blacks, while in the center of the village Numa stood glaring and growling above his kills.

At last a tribesman flung wide the gates of the village and sought safety amid the branches of the forest trees beyond. Like sheep his fellows followed him, until the lion and his dead remained alone in the village.

From the nearer trees the men of Mbonga saw the lion lower his great head and seize one of his victims by the shoulder and then with slow and stately tread move down the village street past the open gates and on into the jungle. They saw and shuddered, and from another tree Tarzan of the Apes saw and smiled.

A full hour elapsed after the lion had disappeared with his feast before the blacks ventured down from the trees and returned to their village. Wide eyes rolled from side to side, and naked flesh contracted more to the chill of fear than to the chill of the jungle night.

"It was he all the time," murmured one. "It was the devil-god." "He hanged himself from a lion to a man, and back again into a lion," whispered another.

"And he dragged Mweeza into the forest and is eating him," said a third, shuddering.

"We are no longer safe here," wailed a fourth. "Let us take our belongings and search for another village site far from the haunts of the wicked devil-god."

But with morning came renewed courage, so that the experiences of the preceding evening had little other effect than to increase their fear of Tarzan and strengthen their belief in his supernatural origin.

And thus waned the fame and the power of the ape-man in the mysterious haunts of the savage jungle where he ranged, mightiest of beasts because of the man-mind which directed his giant muscles and his flawless courage.

The final complete Jungle Tale will appear Saturday, August 16.