

TARZAN OF THE APES

The White Ape

adapted by Felicia Andrews Rokaas



The ape tribe roamed a jungle close to the sea.

KEY WORDS

orphan	<i>child whose parents are dead</i>
tribe	<i>group</i>
agile	<i>able to move quickly and easily</i>
shame	<i>feeling of guilt and embarrassment</i>
handsome	<i>good-looking, beautiful</i>
vow	<i>promise</i>

Pirates abandon an English couple on a jungle coast, far from civilization. Soon after, their baby son is born. Sadly, both parents die. The baby faces certain death. But an ape named Kala finds the orphan. She brings him back to her tribe and becomes his mother.

Kala held her little orphan tenderly. She thought, “Why isn’t he as strong as the others? It took forever before he could walk. And still he cannot climb!”

Sometimes Kala asked the other mothers about him. No one understood why the child was so slow. Twelve moons had passed since Kala found the baby. Still he could not find food alone. All of the other little apes were far ahead of him.

Tublat, Kala’s husband, was not pleased.

“He will never be a great ape,” he said to his wife. “You will always have to carry and protect him. What good will he be? None. Let us leave him in the tall grass.”

“Never, Tublat,” said Kala. “I will carry Tarzan forever, if I need to.”

For Tarzan was the child’s name. It meant “White Skin”.

Tublat went to Kerchak, the tribe’s leader. Maybe he could force Kala to give up little Tarzan. When Kerchak spoke to her about it, Kala threatened to run away with the child. So they spoke about it no more. The tribe did not want to lose Kala.

The ape tribe roamed a jungle close to the sea. They were always on the move. Sometimes adventures broke the sameness of their daily life. Otherwise, each day was a round of searching for food, eating, and sleeping.

When darkness fell, the apes slept on the ground. If the night was cold, two or three might cuddle together for warmth. Tarzan slept with his mother this way. Kala loved her child with all of her heart, and he loved her with all of his.

Tarzan’s life with the apes was happy, for he remembered no other life. His world was this jungle and the wild animals that lived there.

Over time, Tarzan got better. By the time he was ten, Tarzan was an excellent climber. He was also much smarter than his friends. But they were larger and stronger. They were fully grown, but Tarzan was still a half-grown boy.

Yet such a boy!

Tarzan spent his days speeding through the treetops with his friends. He used his hands to swing from branch to branch and leaped easily between trees. He could climb up and down the highest tree faster than a squirrel. The boy grew stronger and stronger, and more and more agile.

About this time, Tarzan first understood that he was different from the others. His little body, brown from the sun, had no hair. It was like a horrible snake. He felt shame and covered himself in mud. But the mud dried and fell off.

One day during the dry season, the tribe visited a lake in the higher land. There Tarzan saw his face for the first time. He and his friend had gone to drink. When they leaned over, the water mirrored both faces. Tarzan was shocked. Having no hair was bad enough, but to own such an ugly face! How could the others look at him?

Such a weak mouth and tiny teeth compared to his friend's powerful lips and fangs. How pitiful his narrow little nose looked next to the broad nose of his friend. Tarzan thought, "It must be fine to be so handsome." Then Tarzan saw his own eyes – a brown spot, a gray circle and then whiteness! Frightful, not even snakes had such ugly eyes.

Tarzan was so lost in these unhappy thoughts that he did not sense danger nearby. He did not hear something move in the tall grass behind them. Neither did his friend, who was drinking loudly.

A short distance behind them crouched a huge lioness. She lashed her tail. Then she moved a great paw forward, silently. She drew closer, her belly low, almost touching the ground. A great cat ready to spring.

Now she was ten feet behind them. Slowly she drew her back feet up beneath her body. Powerful muscles rolled under her beautiful skin. Her tail lay quiet and straight behind her.

She stopped for a moment. Then, with an awful scream, she sprang.

Sabor, the lioness, was a wise hunter. Her wild scream was not a warning. She used it to paralyze her prey with fear. It gave her time to sink her claws into their soft flesh. This worked with the ape, but not with the boy. Tarzan's brain and muscles went into instant action.

In front of him lay the deep waters of the lake, behind him certain death. His wild mother had taught him to stay away from water, except to drink. Before Sabor had finished her leap, Tarzan felt the cold water close around his head.

Tarzan could not swim, and the water was deep. Rapidly he moved his hands and feet, up and down. Within seconds, his nose was above water. He kept moving. On the bank, he saw the cruel lioness. She was crouching on the still form of his friend.

Sabor watched Tarzan and waited. But the boy knew to stay in the water. He called out for help. A call came in answer. At once, forty or fifty apes came screeching through the trees. In the lead was Kala. She knew Tarzan's call and understood he was in danger.

The lioness did not want to meet these angry apes. With a snarl, she sprang into the grass and was gone.

Tarzan swam to shore and climbed into his mother's arms.

Before Tarzan slept that night, he made a vow. One day he would catch Sabor, the lioness. He would show her who was king of the jungle.

adapted from Tarzan of the Apes by Edgar Rice Burroughs

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who is Tarzan's new mother?
- 2 What does "Tarzan" mean?
- 3 How does Tarzan look different from his friends?
- 4 What does Tarzan do when the lioness springs?
- 5 What happens to his friend?
- 6 What does Tarzan vow to do to Sabor, the lioness?