TARZAN IS AN EXPATRIATE

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Tarzan lives!

He is still the King of the Jungle!

Consider the following quotation, from *The Man Eaters of Tsavo,* by Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Patterson, D.S.O.:

Shortly I saw scores of lights twinkling through the bushes: every man in camp turned out, and with tom-toms beating and horns blowing came running to the scene. They surrounded my eyrie, and to my amazement prostrated themselves on the ground before me, saluting me with cries of "Mabarak! Mabarak!" *which I believe means "blessed one" or "Savior.". . . We all returned in triumph to the camp, where great rejoicings were kept up for the remainder of the night, the Swahili and other African natives celebrating the occasion by an especially wild and savage dance. For my part I anxiously awaited the dawn.*

Photographs by Marion Kaplan, except where noted

There is a human shape that stands astride this description and a thousand others like it. It is the shape of Tarzan, prime symbol of Africa.

My knowledge of Tarzan is that of a person who, fifteen years ago, spent Sunday afternoons on the living room floor on his elbows, reading that serious comic inspired by Edgar Rice Burroughs's novels. Tarzan may be gone from the comics; I have no way of knowing. But I do know that he is here, in Africa, in the flesh. I see him every day.

The Tarzan I remember was a strong white man in a leather loincloth, always barefoot; and he was handsome, a wise mesomorph, powerful, gentle, and humorless. The animals all knew him. He spoke to them cryptically, in a sort of private Kitchen Swahili (two of the words he frequently used were *bundolo* and *tarmangani*). The animals replied in bubbles that only Tarzan understood. Although he was known as Tarzan, "The Ape-Man," he was undeniably a man and bore not the slightest trace of simian genes.

There was Jane. She aroused me: her enormous breasts strained the makeshift knots on her monkeyskin brassiere; she

"a small superior group: white, human, strong"

was also barefoot, an added nakedness that in the case of a woman is certainly erotic, and she walked on the balls of her feet. She was watchful, worried that Tarzan might be in danger. When she sniffed trouble she had a sexy habit of thrusting out those breasts of hers, cocking her head to the side and cupping her hand to her ear. Boy, the odd epicene child, appeared on the living room floor one week and stayed, as pubescent as the day I first laid eyes on him: slender, hairless, a little Boy Scout with his child-sized spear.

And my Tarzan, real or the result of a dim recollection dimmed even further by my being remote in time and place, defined his society and implied its close limits when he said, pointing, "Me Tarzan . . . You Jane . . . Him Boy . . ."

In spite of the fact that there was a green parrot with his claws dug into Tarzan's shoulder, a monkey holding his hand, and a lion faithfully dogging his tracks, Tarzan did not admit these creatures to his definition. In the most politic way, by not mentioning them, he excluded the animals from the society of the intimate white three. There was no question of equality: the fact remained that the animals simply were not the same and could therefore never have the same rights as the humans. Tarzan did not aggravate the situation; he asserted his authority over the animals very passively. When there was trouble, the animals rallied round; they served Tarzan, grunted their bubble messages, and assisted him. Except in a time of jungle crisis, Tarzan had little or nothing to do with them. Distance was understood. Tarzan never became bestial; he ate cooked food and, to my knowledge, never bit or clawed any of his enemies or buggered his functionaries. Yes, of course he swung on vines, beat his chest, and roared convincingly, but these gestures were not an expression of thorough animalism as much as they were the signal of a certain solidarity with the animals; as gestures they demonstrated futility as well as sympathy, and it was this sympathy that made them seem genuine.

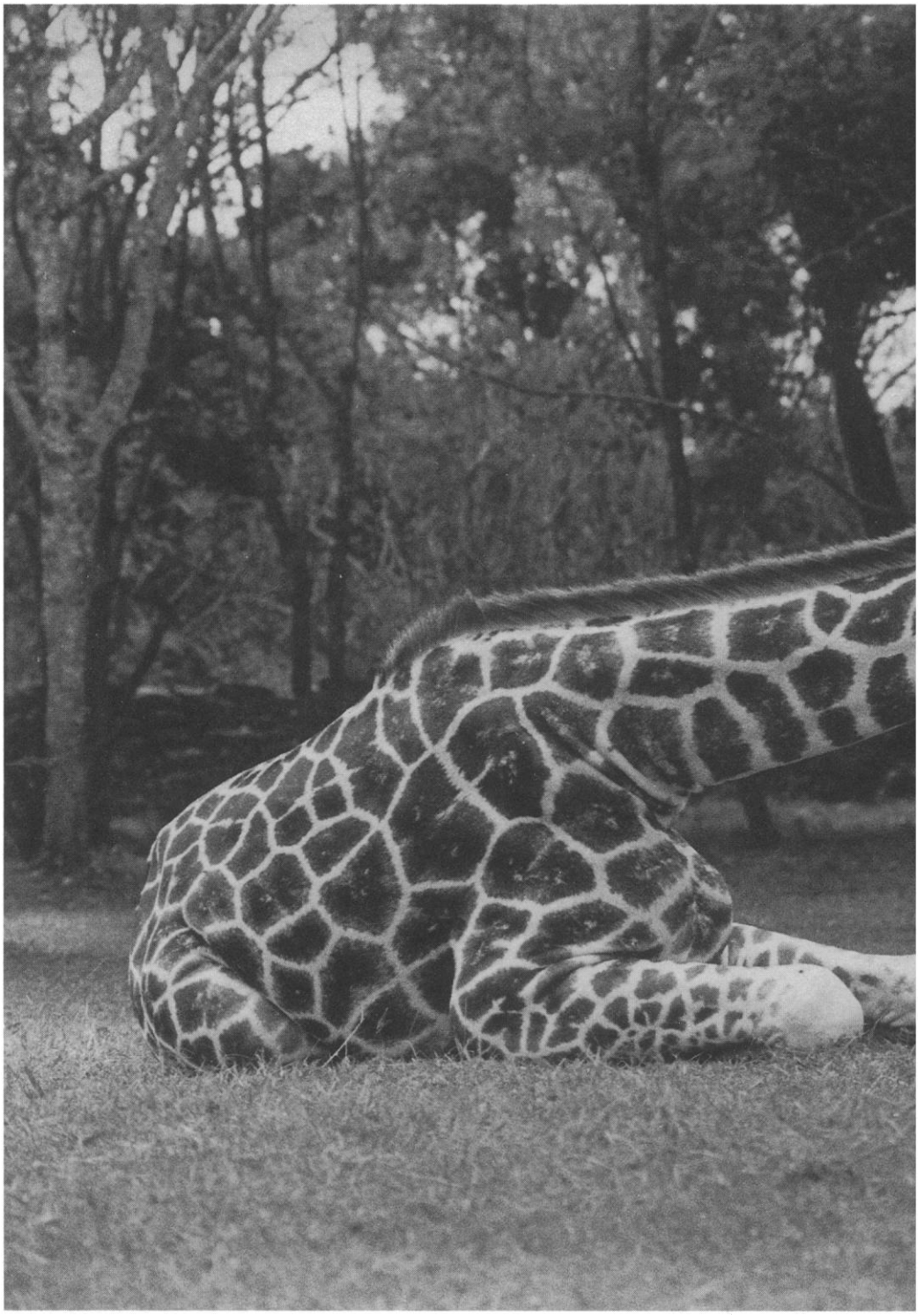
Still, even the skillful pose that the gestures ultimately comprised was not a pose that anyone could bring off. Only Tarzan could beat his chest and win respect. Others would be laughed at.

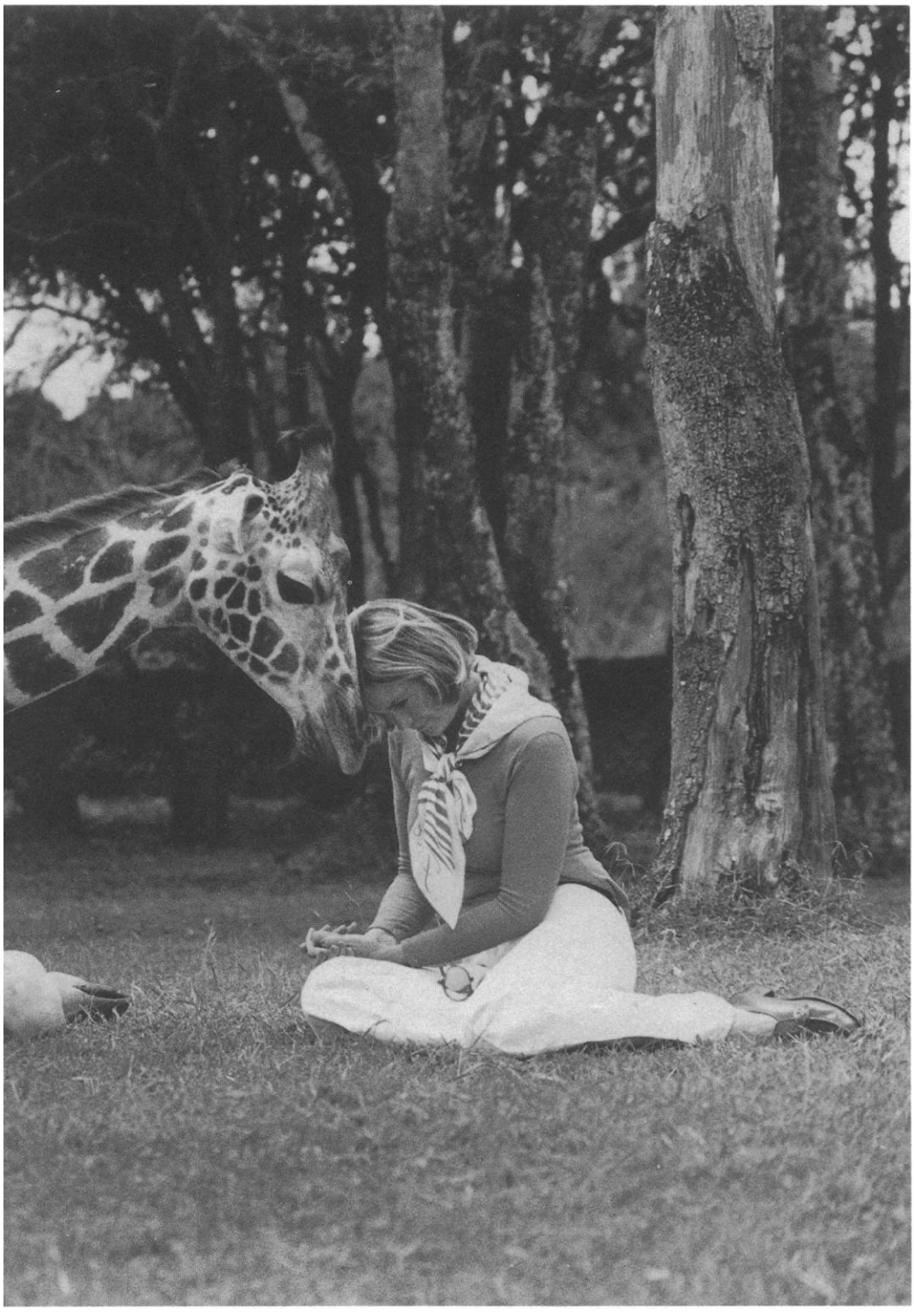
Having defined his society (a small su-

perior group: white, human, strong), Tarzan still recognized that he was in the jungle. His definition therefore was an assertion of exclusiveness which, coupled with the fact that he did not want to leave the jungle, seemed to indicate that he wanted to be a king; or, if "king" is objectionable, then he wanted to be special, lordly, powerful. We have established the fact that he was not an "ape-man" and we know that he was above the lion and the elephant, both of which are known as King of the Jungle, according to who has faced them (the lion-hunters plump for the lion, the elephant-hunters for the elephant). Above all, Tarzan had conquered the animals with an attitude, an air; no force was involved in the conquering, and so it was the easiest and most lasting victory. This gave rise to a master-servant relationship with the animals rather than a master-slave relationship; the slave does not know his master, the servant does; the servant is overpowered by an attitude, the slave by a whip.

Tarzan was contemptuous of all outsiders, especially those who were either hunters or technicians. When the old scientist and his daughter lose their way in the bush and are confronted by Tarzan, it turns out that Tarzan is wiser than the scientist and Jane has bigger breasts than the daughter; if there is a boy involved, he is a simpleton compared with Boy. The animals feared the botanist in the cork helmet, the anthropologist in the Land Rover; Tarzan had hatred and contempt for them. But though he hated these people who had special knowledge of jungle fauna and flora, Tarzan was still interested, in a highly disorganized way, in preserving wildlife and keeping the jungle virgin. Tarzan knew about the jungle: each root, tree, animal, and flower, the composition of soil, the yank of the quicksand, the current of rivers. He had conquered by knowing and he knew because he lived in the jungle. There was very little brainwork in this. It was a kind of savage osmosis: he took the knowledge through his skin and he was able to absorb this wisdom because he was in

"keeping the jungle virgin"
AP/Wide World





"Above all, Tarzan had conquered the animals with an attitude, an air."

"a wish to be special"

Africa; he learned by being in the jungle. All that was necessary in this learning-experience was his physical presence.

He did not harm the animals; this was enough. He knew everything any animal knew; he lived among the animals but not with them. The animals traipsed after him and sometimes he followed them; still the relationship was one of master and servant, with an important distance implied—no one, for example, ever suspected Tarzan of sodomy. He did not kill as outsiders did, and at most he wounded or crippled, though usually he sprang an ingenious trap, embarrassing the enemy with helplessness instead of allowing him the dignity of a violent jungle death. He led a good vegetarian life, a life made better because he had no ambition except to prevent the interruption of his passive rule. He was indolent, but still there was nothing in the jungle Tarzan could not do.

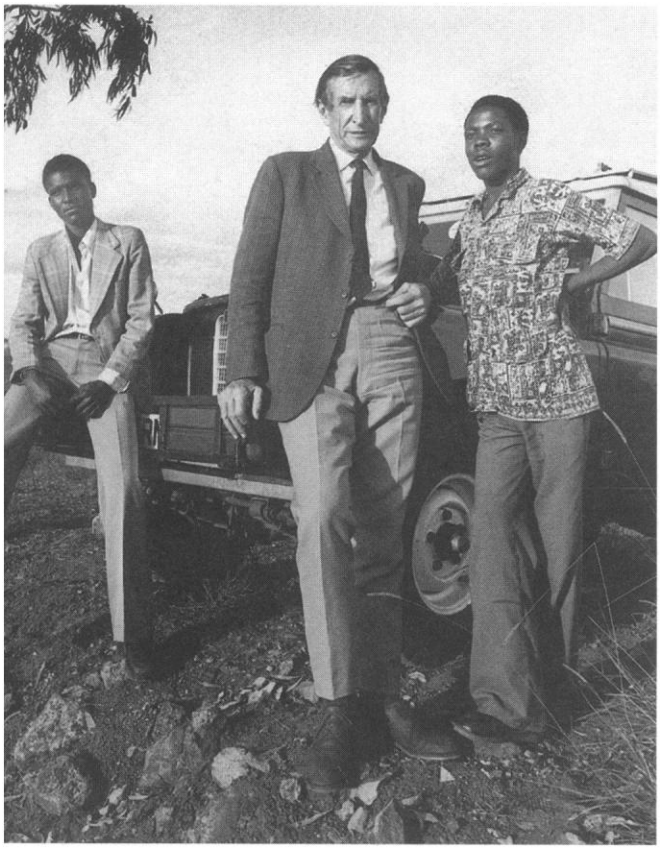
The phrase *in the jungle* is important. Take Tarzan out of the jungle and he would be powerless. His element was the jungle, and yet he was not *of* the jungle. He was clearly an outsider, obviously a man; much more than Robinson Crusoe, who was inventive, impatient, and self-conscious, Tarzan was the first expatriate.

We should not wonder why Tarzan came to the jungle. The reasons Tarzan had could be the same as those of any white expatriate in Africa: an active curiosity in things strange; a vague premonition that Africa rewards her visitors; a disgust with the anonymity of the industrial setting; a wish to be special; and an unconscious desire to stop thinking and let the body take over. All these reasons are selfish to a degree. Mixed with them may be the desire to do a little good, to help in some way; but this is desire together with the knowledge that the good deeds will be performed in a pleasant climate. This, in the end, is not so much a reason for coming as it is an excuse. The wish to be special (and rewarded) is dominant; the need for assertion—the passive assertion, the assertion of color—by a man's mere physical presence eventually dominates the life of the expatriate. Tarzan must stand out; he is non-violent, but his muscles show.

Curiosity is the first to go. It may draw a person away from home, but in Africa it diminishes, and finally dies. When the expatriate feels he knows the country in which he is working, he loses interest. There is a simple level at which the expatriate learns quickly and easily about his surroundings, and no one is more in his surroundings than the expatriate—the lack of privacy is almost total, but privacy is something upon which very few in Africa place a high value. The expatriate learns the settler anecdotes and racial jokes, the useful

"slanted toward white superiority"

commands for the servants, the endless dialect stories about the habits of Africans, and the rules of conduct which are expected of him as a white man in a black country. All of this information is slanted toward white superiority—the African as animal—and again, this kind of assertion is based on color. A sample Kenyan story concerns a white man who sees an African walking a dog. "Where are you going with that baboon?" the white man asks. "This isn't a baboon, it's a dog," says the African. "I'm not talking to you!" the white man snaps. There are the expatriate truisms: never give an African anything—Africans really don't want anything; if you run over an African on the road, you must drive away as fast as you can or you'll be killed by the murderous mob that gathers (this is not refuted even by the staunchest liberals); Africans smell, have rhythm, don't wash, are terribly happy, and so forth. There are the vernacular commands, all of which can be learned in a matter of days: "Cut the wood," "Dry the dishes," "Mop the floor," "Get bwana's slippers," "Don't be sulky to Memsahib." The rules of conduct for whites are aimed at keeping up expatriate morale: never argue with a fellow expatriate in the presence of an African; always offer a lift to whites you see walking in the road; never be a loner or exclude other whites from your society, especially in up-country places; feel free to drop in on fellow expatriates—expect them to drop in on you; when



"His color sets him apart."

traveling, get the names of all the whites on your route; develop an anti-Indian prejudice; fornication, conversation, and general truck with Africans must be covert and kept to a minimum— sleeping with tribeswomen is bad for the morale of expatriate wives. The jokes, the racial stereotypes, the vernacular commands, the rules of conduct—all of these tell the expatriate that he is different, he is superior, he is Tarzan. This information is sought by the recently-arrived expatriate; his confidence is built on such information. When he knows enough so that he won't blunder unknowingly into liberalism, and so that he is able to dominate everyone except those in his rigidly-defined society, he stops seeking.

He wants to do more than merely stay alive; he *does* want to be special, visible, one of the few. But this is the easiest thing of all, and so surprising in its ease that the result is a definite feeling of racial superiority. His color alone makes him distinct. He does not have to lift a finger. The great moment in the life of every expatriate comes when he perceives that, for the first time in his life, people are watching him; he is not anonymous in a crowd, in a line, in a theater or a bar. With the absence of strict segregation he is even more distinct: he is *among* but not *with*; drinking in a bar where there are many Africans, he will stand out. His color sets him apart, and those he is among nearly always respect him and keep their distance: the Indian shopkeeper rubs his hands and scurries around trying to please him; the African carries his shopping for twenty cents, singles him out in a crowd and offers to wash his car while the expatriate watches a film, takes his place for a penny in the stamp line at the post office, and a hundred other things. The realization that he is white in a black country, and respected for it, is the turning point in the expatriate's career. He can either forget it or capitalize on it. Most choose the latter. It is not only the simplest path, it is the one that panders most to his vanity and material well-being. He may even decide to fortify his uniqueness by carefully choosing affectations: odd clothes, a walking stick, a lisp, a different accent; he may develop a penchant for shouting at his servants, losing his temper, or drinking a quart of whisky a day; he may take to avocados, afternoon siestas, or small boys. When the expatriate goes too far with his affectations, his fellow expatriates say

he is a victim of "bush fever." But they know better. What the expatriate is doing is preparing his escape, not out of the jungle, but into retirement—that long sleep until death comes to kill—within the jungle. Having proven his uniqueness by drawing attention to his color, by hinting through his presence that he is different, by suggesting through a subtle, actionless language that he is a racist and perhaps demonstrating one or two feats of physical or intellectual strength, he retires to a quiet part of the jungle and rests. He is fairly sure that no one will bother him, and that he will be comfortable.

Reward is a certainty. I speak about East and Central Africa. There are very few expatriates in these parts of Africa who do not make more money here than they would make at home. The standard of expatriate living is always very high: here the watchful parrot is a Nubian night watchman for the house, and the rest of Tarzan's useful animal servants have their equally talented counterparts in the cook, houseboy, steward, driver, gardener, and so forth. There is a functionary at every turn: carpenters, tailors, garage mechanics, baby-sitters, and car washers—each of whom will work for a song. They have been trained by other Tarzans, and there are always more candidates who are jobless, poor, with large families and small gardens, and not the slightest notion of either comfort or salary. It is easy to train them, to keep them employed, and especially to dominate them. If they work poorly, they can be fired on the spot; it is unlikely that the Labor Officer will get after the former employer and intercede on the fired man's behalf. If the Labor Office did care to make an issue of it, it would probably lose. In the parts of Africa where I have lived, whites do not lose arguments.

There are further rewards, equally as tempting for Tarzan as the servants and functionaries. There are baggage allowances, expatriation allowances, children's education allowances, mileage allowances, subsidized housing, squash courts, golf courses, swimming pools, and mostly-white clubs. The sun shines every day of the year on the flowers. There are holidays: a car trip to Mombasa, climbing and camping in the snow-covered Mountains of the Moon with a score of bearers, a visit to the volcanoes of Rwanda or the brothels of Nairobi, a sail in a chow, a golfing vacation in the Northern Region. One day's drive from where I write this can take me to pygmies, elephants, naked Karamojong warriors (who, for a shilling, will let me photograph them glowering into the lens), leopards, the Nile River, a hydroelectric dam, Emin Pasha's fort, palatial resorts, Murchison Falls, or the Congo.

The expatriate has all of these rewards, together with a distinct knowledge that no one will bother him; he will be helped by the Africans and overrated by his friends who stayed in England or the United States. He is Tarzan, the King of the Jungle. He will come to expect a degree of adulation as a matter of course. He is no longer hurrying down a filthy subway escalator, strewn with ads for girdles, to a crowded train in which he will be breathed upon by dozens of sweating, over-dressed people; he is no longer stumbling up another escalator to his home where his children are croaking and shrieking on the floor, wallowing unattended in rubbish like frogs. Tarzan had his vine; the expatriate has his car and, very likely, driver. The

idea of using public transportation does not occur to the expatriate; it exists for the public, not him. Africans will wave to him as he drives by in his car; some, in up-country places, will fall to their knees as he passes. He will have few enemies, but even if he had many, none would matter. Everyone else is on his side. He is Tarzan.

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There is the death of the mind. The expatriate does not have to think; he has long since decided that nothing should change, the jungle should not alter. In Africa, he is superior and should remain so. Most agree with him; all the people he works with agree with him; Africans with money and position are the most convinced of all that change means upsetting the nature of society.

These Africans have come around to the expatriate point of view; they have been conquered with an attitude and a little money; they settle tribal disputes by saying to the tribesmen, "Let's be English about this," and ask the expatriate's indulgence in not being critical of the brutal and bloody suppression of a tribe or opposition party or minority group. "These are difficult transitional years for our developing country" is the excuse for these purges.

The expatriate does not enter any fray; he takes Tarzan's view: it is wrong —because it is unnatural—to try and settle jungle quarrels. It proves nothing. The animals may chatter and squabble, but this is of no concern to Tarzan; this is nature at her purest and should not be interfered with.

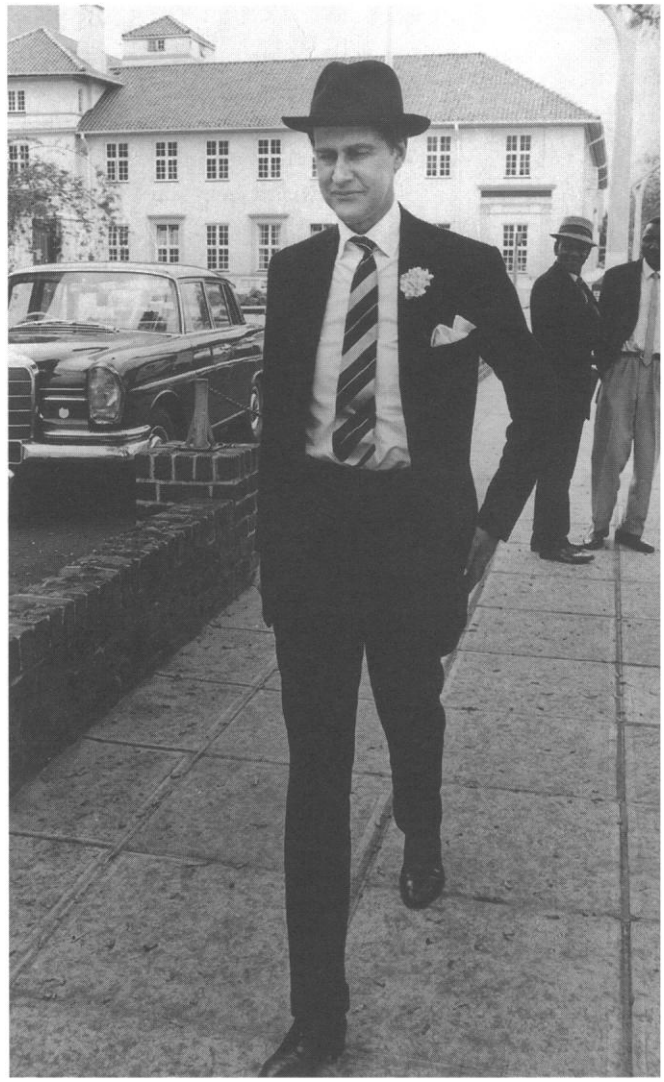
The mind dies and Tarzan discovers flesh. The suspicion about Africa that the expatriate had in a cold English or American suburb is confirmed in a Mombasa bar or a Lagos nightclub, when three or four slim black girls begin fighting over him. They also fight for the fat bald man sitting in the corner, for the Italian merchant marine jigging in the center of the floor with his pants down, for the Yugoslavian ape-man who has just stumbled in and is now tearing the pinball machine apart. The expatriate has gone away from home to give his flesh freedom. He never guessed how simple the whole process was. What makes it all the simpler is that there is no blame attached. Even if there were blame or reprisals, only the embassy would suffer. The expatriate is soon ardently dealing in skin, and this, with the death of the mind and the conscious assertion of color, is the beginning of the true Tarzan Complex. The expatriate has been served, waited on, pandered to, pimped for, and overpaid; he has fed the image of his uniqueness and his arrogance has reached its full vigor.

There is a plain truth that must be stated as well. This Tarzan, like the Tarzan of the comics, is not an objectionable man. He is not Mr. Kurtz, Major Mike Hoare, or Cecil Rhodes. There is very little that can be called sinister about him. There was little duplicity in his reasons for coming to Africa. Overthrowing the government by force is the furthest thing from his mind. What is most striking about him is his ordinariness: he is a very ordinary white person in an extraordinary setting. He is a white man starting to wilt, sweating profusely, among millions of black men, *frangipanis*, wild animals, and bush foliage.

The liberal has it both ways. He en-

joys all the privileges of Tarzan and still is able to say that he is a nationalist. He is the reversible Tarzan. His speech is entirely at odds with his actions: he bullies his servants in one breath and advocates class struggle in the next. When there is trouble, he becomes Tarzan, with all of Tarzan's characteristic passivity. He does not fight, and yet the schizoid nature of his existence drives him occasionally to apologize for a brutal black regime. The archetypal Tarzan never apologizes; he accepts the behavior of the animals insofar as it does not bother him, Jane, or Boy. The liberal Tarzan denies that there are differences in the jungle and insists that his color means nothing. But his life is much the same as the Tarzan expatriate, and his motives for coming to Africa are likewise the same. He is the most fortunate liberal on earth. He makes a virtue of keeping silent while the jungle is spattered with gunfire. He knows he will lose his job and have to go home if he criticizes the ruling party. Although he may say he is concerned with freedom, he knows that certain topics are taboo: in Kenya he cannot defend the Asians when they are under attack; in Tanzania, Malawi, and a dozen other countries he cannot be critical of the one-party form of government; in Uganda he cannot mention that, one year ago, there was a forcible and bloody suppression of the largest tribe in the country. He believes that he has won over the Africans by saying the right things and praising the injustices. But the African attitude toward him, because it is based on color, is no different from the attitude toward the average non-political expatriate.

The liberal's paradise seems to be a place where he can hold leftist opinions in a lovely climate. Sub-Saharan Africa is one of these paradises: the old order does not alter, the revolutions change nothing, and to be white is still to be right; being British is an added bonus. The liberal quacking may continue, and the liberal may pretend that he is not Tarzan, but he is Tarzan as much as any tight-lipped civil servant admiring his jacarandas. The Tory Tarzan keeps silent; the liberal Tarzan says, "Hear, hear," when



"carefully chosen affectations"

the preventive detention legislation is passed.

A person should not agree to work in a country that demands silence of him. This rids the person of any human obligations and helps him to become Tarzan, the strong white man who has what he wants at the expense of millions of people who serve him in one way or another; he has everything, those around him have nothing. The very fact that silence is a condition of getting the job should indicate, especially to the academics, that the government is not ready for him. With this release from any feelings of sympathy or any real obligations toward the people he is among, the expatriate has a lot of free time to think, but no set standard for reflection except the fleshy excesses of past Tarzans. In this climate, with no sensible limits on thought, fascism is easy. This is the extreme no one expected before he came. The simple selfishness that was a part of all his reasons for coming to Africa had nothing to do with fascism, but within the slowly decaying condition of mind that is realized after years of sun and crowds, disorder and idleness, there is a definite racial bias. It is not a scientific thing; rather, it is the result of being away, being idle among those he does not know. His voice gets shrill, unrecognizable, but he cannot speak; he has taken a vow of silence; his bad temper increases. An extended time in this unnatural pose can make him hateful; a black face laughing in the heat or screaming, a knot of black people merely standing, muttering on the street corner, can make him a killer.

The sun should make no one a fascist, but it is more than the sun: it is a whole changed way of looking and feeling. "I now understand apartheid," says the Israeli hotel owner who has spent two years in Nigeria. "Frankly, I like the stupid Africans best," says the white army officer in Malawi. "I wouldn't give you a shilling for the whole lot of them," says the businessman in Kenya. "Oh, I know they're frightfully inefficient and hopeless at politics—but, you know, they're terribly sweet," says the liberal English lady. If I stay here much longer I will begin to talk like this as well. I do not want that to happen. I do not want to be Tarzan and cannot think of anything drearier or more stupid and barbarous than racism. The last thing I want to be is the King of the Jungle, any jungle, and that includes Boston as much as it does Bujumbura.

Somewhere along the way, there was an understanding reached between Tarzan and his followers. Either it was a collaboration—"don't bother me and I won't bother you"—or it was true conquering that was in some ways permanent. There must have been this understanding or there would not be so many Tarzans today. I refuse to collaborate or conquer and further refuse to sit by while the double-talk continues. Until someone is able to convince the African governments that fascism is not the special property of the Italians and Germans, I will leave you to reflect on the reason why independent African rule has made it infinitely easier for Tarzan, complete with *fasces*, to exist undisturbed and unchallenged.