

THE BASHA'S
GORILLA



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The Basha's Gorilla

by William Patterson White

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*Desire is the making or the unmaking of men,
and laughing last is not essentially a sign of joy*

"No," said Jack Allis reflectively, "it ain't a white man's country."

I made no reply. None was necessary. The only people on the beach besides we two were Moors, Riffs, and a brace of Scorpions who had made themselves unwelcome in Gibraltar.

"There is something like," Allis continued, waving his cigarette at a large steam-yacht anchored a mile out. "I'd like to be chief in her, instead of opening throttles in these blasted Portugee tramps -- and I've not done that for a year. Lord knows I'd sell my soul for a fistful of good, oily waste and the smell of an engine room."

"I know what you mean," I said, "but I'm not keen on engine rooms. I'd like to see a real woman -- the kind that wears rustling clothes and little bits of slippers."

"I like barmaids myself," said Allis vaguely.

"Barmaids! Oh, Lord!"

"Yes, barmaids! What's wrong with a nice, well-built barmaid? I knew one once -- black hair and blue eyes, used to work in a pub near the Victoria docks. She was a little bit of alright, and I liked her fine, and gave her a gold ring I bought in a pawn-shop.

"But one day I came in unexpectedly from a voyage and caught her

kissing the third engineer of the *Griqualand*. It took four men to pull me off that third engineer. I broke most of the furniture in the place before they got me out in the street.

"I wanted to go back, but the girl was yelling for the police, so I went away quiet and peaceful. She kept my ring, too -- a clear six-shilling loss. Yes, yes, the women have cost me a lot of money one time and another."

"With your share of the coin we made back in that little Cairo deal you can go back and find another barmaid."

"Man, dear, I will not. I've a matter of two hundred pounds, and that's too much for a barmaid. An aunt of mine lives in America, in a nice little village called Huntington.

"She married the captain of a whaler. I'll just go visit her and look around for a wife, one with black hair and blue eyes preferred, though I would take a blonde, if she had a little money."

I thought of a certain dark-haired girl who lived out near King's Highway, and I wondered if she still went down to Brighton and Manhattan. Probably not. Girls are so addicted to marrying. I was still musing on my lost love, when Allis roused me.

"Sun's almost down," he said, "and I'm hungry. Ibrahim's *couscousou* will balance me nicely. Come along."

We walked up the beach, under the grim old *kasba*, and entered the town. In the narrow street where stood Ibrahim's house a Frenchman nearly ran into us.

He sidled past with a slight bow, and went on hurriedly. I did not like his face. It reminded me of a rat.

"He'll be the owner of that steam-yacht," said Allis, "and I'd like to know what's keeping him at Dar-el-Dana. This town ain't exactly a summer resort."

In the guest-room of Ibrahim's house we found the Englishman sitting cross-legged before the low table bearing a dish of *couscousou*, flanked by a fat teapot with sprigs of mint sprouting from its top.

"Late, as usual," said the Englishman. "Two more minutes and I'd have begun. Gad! I'm peckish!"

When the meal was over and we had washed our hands in the brass bowl brought in by Ibrahim's Sus Country slave, we settled ourselves comfortably on the divan and smoked -- Allis and I our Oran cigarettes, and the Englishman a pipe of good green *kief*.

"Have you seen the owner of the steam-yacht?" inquired the Englishman suddenly, laying aside his pipe.

We nodded.

"He's a proper rotter," continued the Englishman. "Came up to me in the Sok this morning and introduced himself. By his card he's the Count of Virel -- by his desires he's a beast.

"Got into conversation, he did. Said he understood I was a man of adventure, and would I assist him in a small matter? I asked what the matter was, and he said coolly enough that it was the carrying off of Aneysha, the daughter of Abdullah, the Shareef."

"Aneysha!" Allis and I exclaimed.

"Right," said the Englishman calmly; "but don't shout. You'll disturb Ibrahim, who's busy sleeping."

"Why, she's the most beautiful girl in Dar-el-Dana," I said slowly.

"Did you knock him down?" asked Allis.

"Knock him down? Certainly not. It would have been like killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Listen to me, and I'll explain how we can make a bit of money out of him."

"By selling Aneysha?" growled Allis. "Not me. I've gotten too many favors from her dad, who's a gentleman, even if he is a bit sunburned."

"We sha'n't sell Aneysha!" exclaimed the Englishman. "We'll play with this Frenchman and sell him up. As a British citizen it is my right and bounden duty to levy toll on the French, and with your help I'll do it. Leave the matter to me. I'll arrange it."

"The Frenchman has already offered me a hundred pounds for the job, but I put him off. He'll come again, no fear, and offer more. When he makes it three hundred I'll close with him. Then we three will divide the loot. Are you in on it?"

"How'll you do it without handing over the girl?" I inquired.

"Easy enough," answered the Englishman. "We'll substitute something else. You know that pet gorilla of the Basha's? I never did like the brute. We'll give him that."

"Man, dear!" said Allis with fine contempt. "He doesn't want a monkey. He'd laugh in your face."

"Of course, of course," returned the Englishman soothingly, "but he won't know it's a monkey. Now then, we'll wrap up Mister Gorilla in six or seven *haiks* and a *djellab* or two, and his own mother won't know him, much less a Frenchman."

"But the smell of him," objected Allis. "He fair reeks, and that's a fact."

"Perfume," said the Englishman. "A gallon or two sprinkled on him, and he'll smell like Paradise."

"That's all right," said I, "but that Frenchman isn't going to buy any pig in a poke without first getting a square look at the pig."

"He will, no fear," said the Englishman cheerily. "I've thought it all out, and according to my plans he'll be in such a hurry that he'll just grab his package and make off on time. We'll see the Basha in the morning. What price gorillas, eh?"

Next morning Allis went down to the beach to keep tabs on the Frenchman, and the Englishman and I went up to the Basha's house. The sleepy sentries at the gate in the outer wall passed us in without demur, and we made our way through the gardens. At the great door of the house the *m'koddem* stood, hands on hips. When he saw us he made obeisance, for the Englishman was known to be a friend of the faithful and a giver of money besides.

"Behold, I am a poor man and thy friend, master," was the *m'koddem's* greeting to the Englishman. To me he said: "*Sidi*, peace be with thee."

"And to thee -- peace," I replied, and then the Englishman asked for the Basha.

"The Illustrious One is among his ladies," said the *m'koddem*, "and --"

"I understand," interrupted the Englishman, slipping a coin into his

hand, "but I have to say which will make his heart rejoice."

"It would seem to rejoice mine also," said the *m'koddem*. "Lord, I will see."

And he departed, biting the piece of silver, for he was a careful man.

Soon the *m'koddem* came hurrying back.

"Comes now the Illustrious One into the inner court," said he, "where he will receive thee."

We followed the *m'koddem* into the inner court, and found the Basha seated on a divan, with *kief* pipes on a small table in front of him. We had barely made our salutattions, when in came a slave bearing the inevitable teapot, with the sprigs of mint and little cups on a brass tray from Fez.

Following the Moorish custom, we did not mention the purpose of our visit, but passed stately compliments to the Basha, whose dull eyes showed that he had been smoking more *kief* than was good for him.

"My friends," said the Basha, when the Englishman was about to open negotiations, "you have never seen my dancers. I bought three a week ago. Circassians are they, and -- but no matter, you shall judge for yourselves."

We did judge, and praised the Basha's taste. For an unrefined, illiterate Moor, he had an uncommonly good eye for dancing girls.

At any other time we would have enjoyed watching them, but the acquisition of the gorilla was more important, and I was glad when the Basha sent his private ballet back to the harem.

And now, my friends," said the Basha, when we were alone, "in what

way can my poor self be of service?"

The Englishman told him, and then I witnessed the edifying spectacle of a fat Basha and a lean Englishman haggling over the price of one medium-sized gorilla, ferocious and very smelly.

As usual, the East conquered the West. It is only in war that the West is victorious. The Englishman offered seven pounds for the brute, and got him for twelve.

"And," said the Basha, when the bargain had been concluded, "you must take him from the cage yourself. He has the anger in him always, and I would as quickly take him out as I would loose a mad camel in the Sok."

The Basha did not inquire into our reasons for purchasing his gorilla. Which was well, for a Moorish official is always anxious to have a finger in every pie.

That afternoon the Frenchman came ashore to confer with the Englishman. Allis and I were present at the meeting. It was a lively session.

The Frenchman almost wept when we told him our price was three hundred pounds -- forty pounds down and the remainder on delivery. The Frenchman wrung his hands and protested, but the Englishman explained that if we were caught kidnaping Aneysha we would certainly be killed, and in a most unlovely fashion. Finally the count agreed to our terms, and we promised to hand over the girl next evening at midnight.

He said his doctor would give us the knockout drops, or their equivalent, if we should come out to the yacht with him.

I sha'n't forget that visit to the steam-yacht. We stayed for dinner, and there were unlimited "King's Pegs."

Allis finished twelve before they affected him. Then he turned rusty. He nearly knocked the deal on the head by calling the count a "Johnny Crapaud." He also aired his views on the French and their habits in choice engine-room English.

Then he wanted to fight me, and he hit the Englishman instead. We managed to get him overside and into the boat at last. Next morning when Allis awoke he had only the pleasantest recollections of the previous evening. It is sometimes a blessing to have no nerves.

"Now, then," said the Englishman after breakfast, "I'm going to tell Ibrahim all about it. We'll need his help."

"Will he understand?" I was dubious.

"Understand! Why, old chap, a Moor has a sense of humor. A bit perverted, perhaps, but a thing like this will tickle the Moorish fancy in a way that will surprise you. Ibrahim's ancestors were pirates -- *Salée*, you know."

I called Ibrahim, and he came in. He removed his yellow slippers and sat upon the divan, as fine-looking a Moor as one could wish to see.

Ibrahim listened intently to the tale. When the Englishman had finished, the Moor placed both hands on his knees, pointed his beard at the ceiling, and laughed gustily. Then he wiped his eyes and spoke:

"*Sidi*, as thou sayest, this dog of a Frenchman -- may other dogs dance upon his grave -- should without doubt have his tongue torn out and his eyes pierced with hot skewers for daring to look upon

Aneysha, the daughter of a Shareef.

Our women go veiled -- as thou knowest -- when they walk abroad, and to see her face he must have spied privily upon her in her father's garden. If Abdullah the Shareef knew this he would neither wash his hands nor sleep till he had found the Frenchman's heart with a knife.

Then trouble would arise, for a war-ship and other Frenchmen, evil, ill-conditioned rogues, would come, and True Believers would suffer. But they way there can be no trouble, but much laughter in its stead.

The boat of the Frenchman will be on the beach west of the *kasba* at midnight? Good! I, Ibrahim el Kaid, will take my two brothers, true men and no chatterers, and make a powder play at the appointed time. Thus will the matter be settled."

At eight o'clock that evening the three of us went up to the Basha's house. The Englishman had partly explained matters to the *m'koddem*, and that worthy man met us at the outer gate with many obeisances and a large bundle of clothes. He led us through the silent gardens to the cage of the gorilla.

The ugly brute, very wide-awake, squatted on his haunches and eyed us malevolently, chewing on a stick the while. I remember how his eyes glittered in the lantern light.

"Behold, master," said the *m'koddem*, "the monkey has had naught to drink since the morning -- as thou didst order."

"Thou hast done well," answered the Englishman. "We will now relieve his thirst."

A slave brought a jug of water, and the Englishman poured into it a

sweet-smelling liquid given him by the yacht's doctor. It was not knockout drops, but the yacht's doctor said it was just as good and would keep a girl unconscious for ten hours.

We thought it would certainly put a gorilla to sleep for five. When the mixture had been well stirred the *m'koddem* attracted the gorilla's attention elsewhere, the Englishman opened the cage-door and slipped the jug inside. The gorilla perceived the jug at once, lifted it with his hairy hands and gulped down every drop.

The drug took hold of the monkey immediately. The brute dropped the jug, gripped the bars of his cage, chattered a bit, then crumpled into a heap on the floor. The Englishman flung the cage-door open, seized the gorilla by the feet, and pulled him out.

Then we three set to work upon him, while the *m'koddem* held the lantern. He also told us how to put on the clothes. It took us three-quarters of an hour to rub in the perfume and attire that gorilla properly.

Finally the job was finished, and we stood back and surveyed the result of our efforts. The odor of the perfume was rather overpowering. The gorilla made a very bulky bundle.

He had on six *haiks* and two heavy *djellabs*. He did not in the least resemble a young lady. Still, in the dark, and if the Frenchman were properly hurried, he might pass as one.

I looked up and caught the *m'koddem's* eye. The Moor had not been told for whom the monkey was intended, but his humorous soul sensed a joke.

"*Sidi*," said the *m'koddem*, "is it a jest?"

"It is," I answered.

"Then I will provide a donkey," said the *m'koddem*. And he did.

Our progress down the hill from the Basha's house was not uneventful. Allis and I held the gorilla on the donkey, while the Englishman urged the little animal on by twisting its tail. Which is the proper method of steering a donkey in Morocco.

Half-way down the monkey tripped over a sleeping dog. We four fell in a heap, and the Englishman roared with laughter until the dog bit him. Then he tried to kill the dog.

"I think," said the Englishman, when the dog had departed, "we'd best not go through town. We don't want to arouse too much comment."

We skirted the town, and on level ground we trotted briskly. The donkey grew weary and tried to lie down several times -- once in somebody's melon-patch.

Luckily for us, we got him up and away without attracting the attention of the owner. We were all sweating freely when we reached the clump of palms underneath the *kasba*.

We dismounted the gorilla and sat down. Allis cursed all monkeys and rubbed his arms. Mine, too, ached not a little.

Three shadows detached themselves from beneath the palms and joined us. They were Ibrahim el Kaid and his two brothers -- true men and no chatterers. The Englishman scratched a match inside his helmet and looked at his watch. The hands marked twenty minutes to twelve.

"Time to trek," said the Englishman.

We bindled the gorilla on the donkey and proceeded slowly along the beach, taking care to keep well away from the water.

There was no point in letting the Frenchman see us too soon. We halted some four hundred yards from the spot where we were to meet him, and stared along the shore line.

"That'll be him," said Allis. "I can make out his boat plain."

"Right," said the Englishman. "Ibrahim, do thou wait in peace till we are fifty paces distant from the boat; then pursue swiftly, shouting and firing."

Ibrahim and his brothers nodded, their white teeth gleaming in the darkness. The Englishman twisted the donkey's tail, and we started to run down the beach to the boat.

Soon shots and yells rang out behind us. The Frenchman's voice called to us in a frightened falsetto.

We ran and the donkey galloped.

"*Vite! Vite!*" shrieked the count as we pulled up at the boat's bow.

"Where's the money?" demanded the Englishman, shoving back two sailors who were attempting to lay hands on the gorilla.

" *Ici!*" stuttered the Frenchman, holding out two plump bags that clinked alluringly.

"Right," said the Englishman, taking the bags. "Here's your fair lady. Quick, now. Her friends are coming. Never mind us."

Ibrahim and his brothers were doing their part of the performance

nobly.

Two sailors seized the gorilla, placed him carefully in the boat -- the count pillowed the veiled and hooded head in his lap -- and shoved off just as the three Moors ran up. The crew bent to their oars and the boat advanced seaward.

Then the three of us collapsed on the sand and stifled our laughter with our coat-sleeves, while the Moors called Allah to witness the discomfiture of the Frenchman.

Suddenly a wild scream from the boat checked our mirth.

"The Frenchman must have opened his bundle," said the Englishman. "It doesn't matter, though. We've got the money, and he'll not dare complain. Funny isn't it?"

Scream after scream and volleys of profane French came from the boat.

"It sounds to me," observed Allis, "as if Mister Gorilla had waked up. I thought I felt him move a little when the sailors took him. That dope wasn't strong enough."

A fair sized riot seemed to be going on in the boat; then we heard a heavy splash, followed by sounds as of a paddle-wheel steamer coming shoreward rapidly.

A minute or two later the gorilla, puffing strongly, scrambled ashore.

Of his many clothes there remained but one *djellab* hung about his neck.

It did not impede his movements, however, for he skipped past us and disappeared up the beach. We never saw him again.

The boat rowed on out to the yacht, and what the Frenchman thought we never knew.

But we will never forget him, for when the bags were opened we discovered the contents to be several pounds of best iron washers, and absolutely nothing else.

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