

19 - The Secret Passage

Mugambi, once a captive, struggles through a challenging jungle terrain, facing hunger, thirst, and the threat of predators. He manages to survive and decides to rest in a newly found fruitful area, intending to regain his strength for his journey back to Waziri. He crafts a shelter and hunts, maintaining a semblance of strength.

Meanwhile, Chulk, an ape with an interest in mimicking humans, observes Mugambi. Chulk, disinterested in the burnoose he previously acquired from Tarzan, now covets Mugambi's simpler apparel. Seizing an opportunity, Chulk steals Mugambi's pouch and knob-stick while the weary man sleeps. The theft goes unnoticed until Mugambi awakens, triggering a blend of superstition and realization when he discovers the thief's footprints.

In a different peril, Jane Clayton finds herself at the cruel mercy of Numa, a formidable lion. After a terrifying ordeal with Taglat, a malicious ape intent on harming her, Jane believes death is inevitable when Numa discovers her. However, a stroke of luck frees her from her bindings, offering a glimmer of hope despite the dire circumstances.

Cunningly, Jane attempts to escape by taking advantage of Numa's temporary distraction. Her attempt to flee to the safety of a tree is fraught with danger, but she manages it just as the lion pounces. Although she finds temporary safety in the tree, her challenges are far from over. Hunger, thirst, and the presence of predators below promise a night of uncertainty.

The next morning, with Numa and the hyenas gone, Jane embarks on her journey, desperate to find the Waziri or some semblance of civilization. Encountering gunshots, she suspects a battle between the Waziri and Arab raiders. Cautiously, she chooses concealment over risking an encounter with potential enemies.

Her caution proves wise when she recognizes M. Jules Frecoult, a recent acquaintance, being stalked by an Arab. Despite her relief at seeing a familiar face, she remains hidden, witnessing a silent confrontation that suggests a complex web of intentions and dangers in the jungle's heart.

