

## **Chapter 2 - Forging Bonds of Hate and ----?**

It was not until late the following afternoon that Tarzan saw anything more of the fellow passengers into the midst of whose affairs his love of fair play had thrust him. And then he came most unexpectedly upon Rokoff and Paulvitch at a moment when of all others the two might least appreciate his company.

They were standing on deck at a point which was temporarily deserted, and as Tarzan came upon them they were in heated argument with a woman. Tarzan noted that she was richly appareled, and that her slender, well-modeled figure denoted youth; but as she was heavily veiled he could not discern her features.

The men were standing on either side of her, and the backs of all were toward Tarzan, so that he was quite close to them without their being aware of his presence. He noticed that Rokoff seemed to be threatening, the woman pleading; but they spoke in a strange tongue, and he could only guess from appearances that the girl was afraid.

Rokoff's attitude was so distinctly filled with the threat of physical violence that the ape-man paused for an instant just behind the trio, instinctively sensing an atmosphere of danger. Scarcely had he hesitated ere the man seized the woman roughly by the wrist, twisting it as though to wring a promise from her through torture. What would have happened next had Rokoff had his way we may only conjecture, since he did not have his way at all. Instead, steel fingers gripped his shoulder, and he was swung unceremoniously around, to meet the cold gray eyes of the stranger who had thwarted him on the previous day.

"SAPRISTI!" screamed the infuriated Rokoff. "What do you mean? Are you a fool that you thus again insult Nikolas Rokoff?"

"This is my answer to your note, monsieur," said Tarzan, in a low voice. And then he hurled the fellow from him with such force that Rokoff lunged sprawling against the rail.

"Name of a name!" shrieked Rokoff. "Pig, but you shall die for this," and, springing to his feet, he rushed upon Tarzan, tugging the meanwhile to draw a revolver from his hip pocket. The girl shrank back in terror.

"Nikolas!" she cried. "Do not--oh, do not do that. Quick, monsieur, fly, or he will surely kill you!" But instead of flying Tarzan advanced to meet the fellow. "Do not make a fool of yourself, monsieur," he said.

Rokoff, who was in a perfect frenzy of rage at the humiliation the stranger had put upon him, had at last succeeded in drawing the revolver. He had stopped, and now he deliberately raised it to Tarzan's breast and pulled the trigger. The hammer fell with a futile click on an empty chamber--the ape-man's hand shot out like the head of an angry python; there was a quick wrench, and the revolver sailed far out across the ship's rail, and dropped into the Atlantic.

For a moment the two men stood there facing one another. Rokoff had regained his self-possession. He was the first to speak.

"Twice now has monsieur seen fit to interfere in matters which do not concern him. Twice he has taken it upon himself to humiliate Nikolas Rokoff. The first offense was overlooked on the assumption that monsieur acted through ignorance, but this affair shall not be overlooked. If monsieur does not know who Nikolas Rokoff is, this last piece of effrontery will insure that monsieur later has good reason to remember him."

"That you are a coward and a scoundrel, monsieur," replied Tarzan, "is all that I care to know of you," and he turned to ask the girl if the man had hurt her, but she had disappeared. Then, without even a glance toward Rokoff and his companion, he continued his stroll along the deck.

Tarzan could not but wonder what manner of conspiracy was on foot, or what the scheme of the two men might be. There had been something rather familiar about the appearance of the veiled woman to whose rescue he had just come, but as he had not seen her face he could not be sure that he had ever seen her before. The only thing about her that he had particularly noticed was a ring of peculiar workmanship upon a finger of the hand that Rokoff had seized, and he determined to note the fingers of the women passengers he came upon thereafter, that he might discover the identity of her whom Rokoff was persecuting, and learn if the fellow had offered her further annoyance.

Tarzan had sought his deck chair, where he sat speculating on the numerous instances of human cruelty, selfishness, and spite that had fallen to his lot to witness since that day in the jungle four years since that his eyes had first fallen upon a human being other than himself--the sleek, black Kulonga, whose swift spear had that day found the vitals of Kala, the great she-ape, and robbed the youth, Tarzan, of the only mother he had ever known.

He recalled the murder of King by the rat-faced Snipes; the abandonment of Professor Porter and his party by the mutineers of the ARROW; the cruelty of the black warriors and women of Mbonga to their captives; the petty jealousies of the

civil and military officers of the West Coast colony that had afforded him his first introduction to the civilized world.

"MON DIEU!" he soliloquized, "but they are all alike. Cheating, murdering, lying, fighting, and all for things that the beasts of the jungle would not deign to possess--money to purchase the effeminate pleasures of weaklings. And yet withal bound down by silly customs that make them slaves to their unhappy lot while firm in the belief that they be the lords of creation enjoying the only real pleasures of existence. In the jungle one would scarcely stand supinely aside while another took his mate. It is a silly world, an idiotic world, and Tarzan of the Apes was a fool to renounce the freedom and the happiness of his jungle to come into it."

Presently, as he sat there, the sudden feeling came over him that eyes were watching from behind, and the old instinct of the wild beast broke through the thin veneer of civilization, so that Tarzan wheeled about so quickly that the eyes of the young woman who had been surreptitiously regarding him had not even time to drop before the gray eyes of the ape-man shot an inquiring look straight into them. Then, as they fell, Tarzan saw a faint wave of crimson creep swiftly over the now half-averted face.

He smiled to himself at the result of his very uncivilized and ungallant action, for he had not lowered his own eyes when they met those of the young woman. She was very young, and equally good to look upon. Further, there was something rather familiar about her that set Tarzan to wondering where he had seen her before. He resumed his former position, and presently he was aware that she had arisen and was leaving the deck. As she passed, Tarzan turned to watch her, in the hope that he might discover a clew to satisfy his mild curiosity as to her identity.

Nor was he disappointed entirely, for as she walked away she raised one hand to the black, waving mass at the nape of her neck--the peculiarly feminine gesture that admits cognizance of appraising eyes behind her--and Tarzan saw upon a finger of this hand the ring of strange workmanship that he had seen upon the finger of the veiled woman a short time before.

So it was this beautiful young woman Rokoff had been persecuting. Tarzan wondered in a lazy sort of way whom she might be, and what relations one so lovely could have with the surly, bearded Russian.

After dinner that evening Tarzan strolled forward, where he remained until after dark, in conversation with the second officer, and when that gentleman's duties called him elsewhere Tarzan lolled lazily by the rail watching the play of the

moonlight upon the gently rolling waters. He was half hidden by a davit, so that two men who approached along the deck did not see him, and as they passed Tarzan caught enough of their conversation to cause him to fall in behind them, to follow and learn what deviltry they were up to. He had recognized the voice as that of Rokoff, and had seen that his companion was Paulvitch.

Tarzan had overheard but a few words: "And if she screams you may choke her until--" But those had been enough to arouse the spirit of adventure within him, and so he kept the two men in sight as they walked, briskly now, along the deck. To the smoking-room he followed them, but they merely halted at the doorway long enough, apparently, to assure themselves that one whose whereabouts they wished to establish was within.

Then they proceeded directly to the first-class cabins upon the promenade deck. Here Tarzan found greater difficulty in escaping detection, but he managed to do so successfully. As they halted before one of the polished hardwood doors, Tarzan slipped into the shadow of a passageway not a dozen feet from them.

To their knock a woman's voice asked in French: "Who is it?"

"It is I, Olga--Nikolas," was the answer, in Rokoff's now familiar guttural. "May I come in?"

"Why do you not cease persecuting me, Nikolas?" came the voice of the woman from beyond the thin panel. "I have never harmed you."

"Come, come, Olga," urged the man, in propitiary tones; "I but ask a half dozen words with you. I shall not harm you, nor shall I enter your cabin; but I cannot shout my message through the door."

Tarzan heard the catch click as it was released from the inside. He stepped out from his hiding-place far enough to see what transpired when the door was opened, for he could not but recall the sinister words he had heard a few moments before upon the deck, "And if she screams you may choke her."

Rokoff was standing directly in front of the door. Paulvitch had flattened himself against the paneled wall of the corridor beyond. The door opened. Rokoff half entered the room, and stood with his back against the door, speaking in a low whisper to the woman, whom Tarzan could not see. Then Tarzan heard the woman's voice, level, but loud enough to distinguish her words.

"No, Nikolas," she was saying, "it is useless. Threaten as you will, I shall never accede to your demands. Leave the room, please; you have no right here. You promised not to enter."

"Very well, Olga, I shall not enter; but before I am done with you, you shall wish a thousand times that you had done at once the favor I have asked. In the end I shall win anyway, so you might as well save trouble and time for me, and disgrace for yourself and your--"

"Never, Nikolas!" interrupted the woman, and then Tarzan saw Rokoff turn and nod to Paulvitch, who sprang quickly toward the doorway of the cabin, rushing in past Rokoff, who held the door open for him. Then the latter stepped quickly out. The door closed. Tarzan heard the click of the lock as Paulvitch turned it from the inside. Rokoff remained standing before the door, with head bent, as though to catch the words of the two within. A nasty smile curled his bearded lip.

Tarzan could hear the woman's voice commanding the fellow to leave her cabin. "I shall send for my husband," she cried. "He will show you no mercy."

Paulvitch's sneering laugh came through the polished panels.

"The purser will fetch your husband, madame," said the man. "In fact, that officer has already been notified that you are entertaining a man other than your husband behind the locked door of your cabin."

"Bah!" cried the woman. "My husband will know!"

"Most assuredly your husband will know, but the purser will not; nor will the newspaper men who shall in some mysterious way hear of it on our landing. But they will think it a fine story, and so will all your friends when they read of it at breakfast on--let me see, this is Tuesday--yes, when they read of it at breakfast next Friday morning. Nor will it detract from the interest they will all feel when they learn that the man whom madame entertained is a Russian servant--her brother's valet, to be quite exact."

"Alexis Paulvitch," came the woman's voice, cold and fearless, "you are a coward, and when I whisper a certain name in your ear you will think better of your demands upon me and your threats against me, and then you will leave my cabin quickly, nor do I think that ever again will you, at least, annoy me," and there came a moment's silence in which Tarzan could imagine the woman leaning toward the scoundrel and whispering the thing she had hinted at into his ear. Only a moment of silence, and then a startled oath from the man--the scuffling of feet--a woman's scream--and silence.

But scarcely had the cry ceased before the ape-man had leaped from his hiding-place. Rokoff started to run, but Tarzan grasped him by the collar and dragged him back. Neither spoke, for both felt instinctively that murder was being done in that room, and Tarzan was confident that Rokoff had had no intention that his

confederate should go that far--he felt that the man's aims were deeper than that--deeper and even more sinister than brutal, cold-blooded murder. Without hesitating to question those within, the ape-man threw his giant shoulder against the frail panel, and in a shower of splintered wood he entered the cabin, dragging Rokoff after him. Before him, on a couch, the woman lay, and on top of her was Paulvitch, his fingers gripping the fair throat, while his victim's hands beat futilely at his face, tearing desperately at the cruel fingers that were forcing the life from her.

The noise of his entrance brought Paulvitch to his feet, where he stood glowering menacingly at Tarzan. The girl rose falteringly to a sitting posture upon the couch. One hand was at her throat, and her breath came in little gasps. Although disheveled and very pale, Tarzan recognized her as the young woman whom he had caught staring at him on deck earlier in the day.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Tarzan, turning to Rokoff, whom he intuitively singled out as the instigator of the outrage. The man remained silent, scowling. "Touch the button, please," continued the ape-man; "we will have one of the ship's officers here--this affair has gone quite far enough."

"No, no," cried the girl, coming suddenly to her feet. "Please do not do that. I am sure that there was no real intention to harm me. I angered this person, and he lost control of himself, that is all. I would not care to have the matter go further, please, monsieur," and there was such a note of pleading in her voice that Tarzan could not press the matter, though his better judgment warned him that there was something afoot here of which the proper authorities should be made cognizant.

"You wish me to do nothing, then, in the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, please," she replied.

"You are content that these two scoundrels should continue persecuting you?"

She did not seem to know what answer to make, and looked very troubled and unhappy. Tarzan saw a malicious grin of triumph curl Rokoff's lip. The girl evidently was in fear of these two--she dared not express her real desires before them.

"Then," said Tarzan, "I shall act on my own responsibility. To you," he continued, turning to Rokoff, "and this includes your accomplice, I may say that from now on to the end of the voyage I shall take it upon myself to keep an eye on you, and should there chance to come to my notice any act of either one of you that might even remotely annoy this young woman you shall be called to account for it

directly to me, nor shall the calling or the accounting be pleasant experiences for either of you.

"Now get out of here," and he grabbed Rokoff and Paulvitch each by the scruff of the neck and thrust them forcibly through the doorway, giving each an added impetus down the corridor with the toe of his boot. Then he turned back to the stateroom and the girl. She was looking at him in wide-eyed astonishment.

"And you, madame, will confer a great favor upon me if you will but let me know if either of those rascals troubles you further."

"Ah, monsieur," she answered, "I hope that you will not suffer for the kind deed you attempted. You have made a very wicked and resourceful enemy, who will stop at nothing to satisfy his hatred. You must be very careful indeed, Monsieur--"

"Pardon me, madame, my name is Tarzan."

"Monsieur Tarzan. And because I would not consent to notify the officers, do not think that I am not sincerely grateful to you for the brave and chivalrous protection you rendered me. Good night, Monsieur Tarzan. I shall never forget the debt I owe you," and, with a most winsome smile that displayed a row of perfect teeth, the girl curtsied to Tarzan, who bade her good night and made his way on deck.

It puzzled the man considerably that there should be two on board--this girl and Count de Coude--who suffered indignities at the hands of Rokoff and his companion, and yet would not permit the offenders to be brought to justice. Before he turned in that night his thoughts reverted many times to the beautiful young woman into the evidently tangled web of whose life fate had so strangely introduced him. It occurred to him that he had not learned her name. That she was married had been evidenced by the narrow gold band that encircled the third finger of her left hand. Involuntarily he wondered who the lucky man might be.

Tarzan saw nothing further of any of the actors in the little drama that he had caught a fleeting glimpse of until late in the afternoon of the last day of the voyage. Then he came suddenly face to face with the young woman as the two approached their deck chairs from opposite directions. She greeted him with a pleasant smile, speaking almost immediately of the affair he had witnessed in her cabin two nights before. It was as though she had been perturbed by a conviction that he might have construed her acquaintance with such men as Rokoff and Paulvitch as a personal reflection upon herself.

"I trust monsieur has not judged me," she said, "by the unfortunate occurrence of Tuesday evening. I have suffered much on account of it--this is the first time that I have ventured from my cabin since; I have been ashamed," she concluded simply.

"One does not judge the gazelle by the lions that attack it," replied Tarzan. "I had seen those two work before--in the smoking-room the day prior to their attack on you, if I recollect it correctly, and so, knowing their methods, I am convinced that their enmity is a sufficient guarantee of the integrity of its object. Men such as they must cleave only to the vile, hating all that is noblest and best."

"It is very kind of you to put it that way," she replied, smiling. "I have already heard of the matter of the card game. My husband told me the entire story. He spoke especially of the strength and bravery of Monsieur Tarzan, to whom he feels that he owes an immense debt of gratitude."

"Your husband?" repeated Tarzan questioningly.

"Yes. I am the Countess de Coude."

"I am already amply repaid, madame, in knowing that I have rendered a service to the wife of the Count de Coude."

"Alas, monsieur, I already am so greatly indebted to you that I may never hope to settle my own account, so pray do not add further to my obligations," and she smiled so sweetly upon him that Tarzan felt that a man might easily attempt much greater things than he had accomplished, solely for the pleasure of receiving the benediction of that smile.

He did not see her again that day, and in the rush of landing on the following morning he missed her entirely, but there had been something in the expression of her eyes as they parted on deck the previous day that haunted him. It had been almost wistful as they had spoken of the strangeness of the swift friendships of an ocean crossing, and of the equal ease with which they are broken forever.

Tarzan wondered if he should ever see her again.