

## Chapter 4 - The Countess Explains

"Your Paris is more dangerous than my savage jungles, Paul," concluded Tarzan, after narrating his adventures to his friend the morning following his encounter with the apaches and police in the Rue Maule. "Why did they lure me there? Were they hungry?"

D'Arnot feigned a horrified shudder, but he laughed at the quaint suggestion.

"It is difficult to rise above the jungle standards and reason by the light of civilized ways, is it not, my friend?" he queried banteringly.

"Civilized ways, forsooth," scoffed Tarzan. "Jungle standards do not countenance wanton atrocities. There we kill for food and for self-preservation, or in the winning of mates and the protection of the young. Always, you see, in accordance with the dictates of some great natural law. But here! Faugh, your civilized man is more brutal than the brutes. He kills wantonly, and, worse than that, he utilizes a noble sentiment, the brotherhood of man, as a lure to entice his unwary victim to his doom. It was in answer to an appeal from a fellow being that I hastened to that room where the assassins lay in wait for me.

"I did not realize, I could not realize for a long time afterward, that any woman could sink to such moral depravity as that one must have to call a would-be rescuer to death. But it must have been so--the sight of Rokoff there and the woman's later repudiation of me to the police make it impossible to place any other construction upon her acts. Rokoff must have known that I frequently passed through the Rue Maule. He lay in wait for me--his entire scheme worked out to the last detail, even to the woman's story in case a hitch should occur in the program such as really did happen. It is all perfectly plain to me."

"Well," said D'Arnot, "among other things, it has taught you what I have been unable to impress upon you--that the Rue Maule is a good place to avoid after dark."

"On the contrary," replied Tarzan, with a smile, "it has convinced me that it is the one worth-while street in all Paris. Never again shall I miss an opportunity to traverse it, for it has given me the first real entertainment I have had since I left Africa."

"It may give you more than you will relish even without another visit," said D'Arnot. "You are not through with the police yet, remember. I know the Paris police well enough to assure you that they will not soon forget what you did to

them. Sooner or later they will get you, my dear Tarzan, and then they will lock the wild man of the woods up behind iron bars. How will you like that?"

"They will never lock Tarzan of the Apes behind iron bars," replied he, grimly.

There was something in the man's voice as he said it that caused D'Arnot to look up sharply at his friend. What he saw in the set jaw and the cold, gray eyes made the young Frenchman very apprehensive for this great child, who could recognize no law mightier than his own mighty physical prowess. He saw that something must be done to set Tarzan right with the police before another encounter was possible.

"You have much to learn, Tarzan," he said gravely. "The law of man must be respected, whether you relish it or no. Nothing but trouble can come to you and your friends should you persist in defying the police. I can explain it to them once for you, and that I shall do this very day, but hereafter you must obey the law. If its representatives say 'Come,' you must come; if they say 'Go,' you must go. Now we shall go to my great friend in the department and fix up this matter of the Rue Maule. Come!"

Together they entered the office of the police official a half hour later. He was very cordial. He remembered Tarzan from the visit the two had made him several months prior in the matter of finger prints.

When D'Arnot had concluded the narration of the events which had transpired the previous evening, a grim smile was playing about the lips of the policeman. He touched a button near his hand, and as he waited for the clerk to respond to its summons he searched through the papers on his desk for one which he finally located.

"Here, Joubon," he said as the clerk entered. "Summon these officers--have them come to me at once," and he handed the man the paper he had sought. Then he turned to Tarzan.

"You have committed a very grave offense, monsieur," he said, not unkindly, "and but for the explanation made by our good friend here I should be inclined to judge you harshly. I am, instead, about to do a rather unheard-of-thing. I have summoned the officers whom you maltreated last night. They shall hear Lieutenant D'Arnot's story, and then I shall leave it to their discretion to say whether you shall be prosecuted or not.

"You have much to learn about the ways of civilization. Things that seem strange or unnecessary to you, you must learn to accept until you are able to judge the motives behind them. The officers whom you attacked were but doing their duty.

They had no discretion in the matter. Every day they risk their lives in the protection of the lives or property of others. They would do the same for you. They are very brave men, and they are deeply mortified that a single unarmed man bested and beat them.

"Make it easy for them to overlook what you did. Unless I am gravely in error you are yourself a very brave man, and brave men are proverbially magnanimous."

Further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the four policemen. As their eyes fell on Tarzan, surprise was writ large on each countenance.

"My children," said the official, "here is the gentleman whom you met in the Rue Maule last evening. He has come voluntarily to give himself up. I wish you to listen attentively to Lieutenant D'Arnot, who will tell you a part of the story of monsieur's life. It may explain his attitude toward you of last night. Proceed, my dear lieutenant."

D'Arnot spoke to the policemen for half an hour. He told them something of Tarzan's wild jungle life. He explained the savage training that had taught him to battle like a wild beast in self-preservation. It became plain to them that the man had been guided by instinct rather than reason in his attack upon them. He had not understood their intentions. To him they had been little different from any of the various forms of life he had been accustomed to in his native jungle, where practically all were his enemies.

"Your pride has been wounded," said D'Arnot, in conclusion. "It is the fact that this man overcame you that hurts the most. But you need feel no shame. You would not make apologies for defeat had you been penned in that small room with an African lion, or with the great Gorilla of the jungles.

"And yet you were battling with muscles that have time and time again been pitted, and always victoriously, against these terrors of the dark continent. It is no disgrace to fall beneath the superhuman strength of Tarzan of the Apes."

And then, as the men stood looking first at Tarzan and then at their superior the ape-man did the one thing which was needed to erase the last remnant of animosity which they might have felt for him. With outstretched hand he advanced toward them.

"I am sorry for the mistake I made," he said simply. "Let us be friends." And that was the end of the whole matter, except that Tarzan became a subject of much conversation in the barracks of the police, and increased the number of his friends by four brave men at least.

On their return to D'Arnot's apartments the lieutenant found a letter awaiting him from an English friend, William Cecil Clayton, Lord Greystoke. The two had maintained a correspondence since the birth of their friendship on that ill-fated expedition in search of Jane Porter after her theft by Terkoz, the bull ape.

"They are to be married in London in about two months," said D'Arnot, as he completed his perusal of the letter. Tarzan did not need to be told who was meant by "they." He made no reply, but he was very quiet and thoughtful during the balance of the day.

That evening they attended the opera. Tarzan's mind was still occupied by his gloomy thoughts. He paid little or no attention to what was transpiring upon the stage. Instead he saw only the lovely vision of a beautiful American girl, and heard naught but a sad, sweet voice acknowledging that his love was returned. And she was to marry another!

He shook himself to be rid of his unwelcome thoughts, and at the same instant he felt eyes upon him. With the instinct that was his by virtue of training he looked up squarely into the eyes that were looking at him, to find that they were shining from the smiling face of Olga, Countess de Coude. As Tarzan returned her bow he was positive that there was an invitation in her look, almost a plea. The next intermission found him beside her in her box.

"I have so much wished to see you," she was saying. "It has troubled me not a little to think that after the service you rendered to both my husband and myself no adequate explanation was ever made you of what must have seemed ingratitude on our part in not taking the necessary steps to prevent a repetition of the attacks upon us by those two men."

"You wrong me," replied Tarzan. "My thoughts of you have been only the most pleasant. You must not feel that any explanation is due me. Have they annoyed you further?"

"They never cease," she replied sadly. "I feel that I must tell some one, and I do not know another who so deserves an explanation as you. You must permit me to do so. It may be of service to you, for I know Nikolas Rokoff quite well enough to be positive that you have not seen the last of him. He will find some means to be revenged upon you. What I wish to tell you may be of aid to you in combating any scheme of revenge he may harbor. I cannot tell you here, but tomorrow I shall be at home to Monsieur Tarzan at five."

"It will be an eternity until tomorrow at five," he said, as he bade her good night. From a corner of the theater Rokoff and Paulvitch saw Monsieur Tarzan in the box of the Countess de Coude, and both men smiled.

At four-thirty the following afternoon a swarthy, bearded man rang the bell at the servants' entrance of the palace of the Count de Coude. The footman who opened the door raised his eyebrows in recognition as he saw who stood without. A low conversation passed between the two.

At first the footman demurred from some proposition that the bearded one made, but an instant later something passed from the hand of the caller to the hand of the servant. Then the latter turned and led the visitor by a roundabout way to a little curtained alcove off the apartment in which the countess was wont to serve tea of an afternoon.

A half hour later Tarzan was ushered into the room, and presently his hostess entered, smiling, and with outstretched hands.

"I am so glad that you came," she said.

"Nothing could have prevented," he replied.

For a few moments they spoke of the opera, of the topics that were then occupying the attention of Paris, of the pleasure of renewing their brief acquaintance which had had its inception under such odd circumstances, and this brought them to the subject that was uppermost in the minds of both.

"You must have wondered," said the countess finally, "what the object of Rokoff's persecution could be. It is very simple. The count is intrusted with many of the vital secrets of the ministry of war. He often has in his possession papers that foreign powers would give a fortune to possess--secrets of state that their agents would commit murder and worse than murder to learn.

"There is such a matter now in his possession that would make the fame and fortune of any Russian who could divulge it to his government. Rokoff and Paulvitch are Russian spies. They will stop at nothing to procure this information. The affair on the liner--I mean the matter of the card game--was for the purpose of blackmailing the knowledge they seek from my husband.

"Had he been convicted of cheating at cards, his career would have been blighted. He would have had to leave the war department. He would have been socially ostracized. They intended to hold this club over him--the price of an avowal on their part that the count was but the victim of the plot of enemies who wished to besmirch his name was to have been the papers they seek.

"You thwarted them in this. Then they concocted the scheme whereby my reputation was to be the price, instead of the count's. When Paulvitch entered my cabin he explained it to me. If I would obtain the information for them he

promised to go no farther, otherwise Rokoff, who stood without, was to notify the purser that I was entertaining a man other than my husband behind the locked doors of my cabin. He was to tell every one he met on the boat, and when we landed he was to have given the whole story to the newspaper men.

"Was it not too horrible? But I happened to know something of Monsieur Paulvitch that would send him to the gallows in Russia if it were known by the police of St. Petersburg. I dared him to carry out his plan, and then I leaned toward him and whispered a name in his ear. Like that"--and she snapped her fingers--"he flew at my throat as a madman. He would have killed me had you not interfered."

"The brutes!" muttered Tarzan.

"They are worse than that, my friend," she said.

"They are devils. I fear for you because you have gained their hatred. I wish you to be on your guard constantly. Tell me that you will, for my sake, for I should never forgive myself should you suffer through the kindness you did me."

"I do not fear them," he replied. "I have survived grimmer enemies than Rokoff and Paulvitch." He saw that she knew nothing of the occurrence in the Rue Maule, nor did he mention it, fearing that it might distress her.

"For your own safety," he continued, "why do you not turn the scoundrels over to the authorities? They should make quick work of them."

She hesitated for a moment before replying.

"There are two reasons," she said finally. "One of them it is that keeps the count from doing that very thing. The other, my real reason for fearing to expose them, I have never told--only Rokoff and I know it. I wonder," and then she paused, looking intently at him for a long time.

"And what do you wonder?" he asked, smiling.

"I was wondering why it is that I want to tell you the thing that I have not dared tell even to my husband. I believe that you would understand, and that you could tell me the right course to follow. I believe that you would not judge me too harshly."

"I fear that I should prove a very poor judge, madame," Tarzan replied, "for if you had been guilty of murder I should say that the victim should be grateful to have met so sweet a fate."

"Oh, dear, no," she expostulated; "it is not so terrible as that. But first let me tell you the reason the count has for not prosecuting these men; then, if I can hold my courage, I shall tell you the real reason that I dare not. The first is that Nikolas Rokoff is my brother. We are Russians. Nikolas has been a bad man since I can remember. He was cashiered from the Russian army, in which he held a captaincy. There was a scandal for a time, but after a while it was partially forgotten, and my father obtained a position for him in the secret service.

"There have been many terrible crimes laid at Nikolas' door, but he has always managed to escape punishment. Of late he has accomplished it by trumped-up evidence convicting his victims of treason against the czar, and the Russian police, who are always only too ready to fasten guilt of this nature upon any and all, have accepted his version and exonerated him."

"Have not his attempted crimes against you and your husband forfeited whatever rights the bonds of kinship might have accorded him?" asked Tarzan. "The fact that you are his sister has not deterred him from seeking to besmirch your honor. You owe him no loyalty, madame."

"Ah, but there is that other reason. If I owe him no loyalty though he be my brother, I cannot so easily disavow the fear I hold him in because of a certain episode in my life of which he is cognizant.

"I might as well tell you all," she resumed after a pause, "for I see that it is in my heart to tell you sooner or later. I was educated in a convent. While there I met a man whom I supposed to be a gentleman. I knew little or nothing about men and less about love. I got it into my foolish head that I loved this man, and at his urgent request I ran away with him. We were to have been married.

"I was with him just three hours. All in the daytime and in public places-- railroad stations and upon a train. When we reached our destination where we were to have been married, two officers stepped up to my escort as we descended from the train, and placed him under arrest. They took me also, but when I had told my story they did not detain me, other than to send me back to the convent under the care of a matron. It seemed that the man who had wooed me was no gentleman at all, but a deserter from the army as well as a fugitive from civil justice. He had a police record in nearly every country in Europe.

"The matter was hushed up by the authorities of the convent. Not even my parents knew of it. But Nikolas met the man afterward, and learned the whole story. Now he threatens to tell the count if I do not do just as he wishes me to."

Tarzan laughed. "You are still but a little girl. The story that you have told me cannot reflect in any way upon your reputation, and were you not a little girl at

heart you would know it. Go to your husband tonight, and tell him the whole story, just as you have told it to me. Unless I am much mistaken he will laugh at you for your fears, and take immediate steps to put that precious brother of yours in prison where he belongs."

"I only wish that I dared," she said; "but I am afraid. I learned early to fear men. First my father, then Nikolas, then the fathers in the convent. Nearly all my friends fear their husbands--why should I not fear mine?"

"It does not seem right that women should fear men," said Tarzan, an expression of puzzlement on his face. "I am better acquainted with the jungle folk, and there it is more often the other way around, except among the black men, and they to my mind are in most ways lower in the scale than the beasts. No, I cannot understand why civilized women should fear men, the beings that are created to protect them. I should hate to think that any woman feared me."

"I do not think that any woman would fear you, my friend," said Olga de Coude softly. "I have known you but a short while, yet though it may seem foolish to say it, you are the only man I have ever known whom I think that I should never fear--it is strange, too, for you are very strong. I wondered at the ease with which you handled Nikolas and Paulvitch that night in my cabin. It was marvellous." As Tarzan was leaving her a short time later he wondered a little at the clinging pressure of her hand at parting, and the firm insistence with which she exacted a promise from him that he would call again on the morrow.

The memory of her half-veiled eyes and perfect lips as she had stood smiling up into his face as he bade her good-by remained with him for the balance of the day. Olga de Coude was a very beautiful woman, and Tarzan of the Apes a very lonely young man, with a heart in him that was in need of the doctoring that only a woman may provide.

As the countess turned back into the room after Tarzan's departure, she found herself face to face with Nikolas Rokoff.

"How long have you been here?" she cried, shrinking away from him.

"Since before your lover came," he answered, with a nasty leer.

"Stop!" she commanded. "How dare you say such a thing to me--your sister!"

"Well, my dear Olga, if he is not your lover, accept my apologies; but it is no fault of yours that he is not. Had he one-tenth the knowledge of women that I have you would be in his arms this minute. He is a stupid fool, Olga. Why, your every word and act was an open invitation to him, and he had not the sense to see it."



The woman put her hands to her ears.

"I will not listen. You are wicked to say such things as that. No matter what you may threaten me with, you know that I am a good woman. After tonight you will not dare to annoy me, for I shall tell Raoul all. He will understand, and then, Monsieur Nikolas, beware!"

"You shall tell him nothing," said Rokoff. "I have this affair now, and with the help of one of your servants whom I may trust it will lack nothing in the telling when the time comes that the details of the sworn evidence shall be poured into your husband's ears. The other affair served its purpose well--we now have something tangible to work on, Olga. A real AFFAIR--and you a trusted wife. Shame, Olga," and the brute laughed.

So the countess told her count nothing, and matters were worse than they had been. From a vague fear her mind was transferred to a very tangible one. It may be, too, that conscience helped to enlarge it out of all proportion.