

Chapter 6 - ADuel

D'Arnot was asleep when Tarzan entered their apartments after leaving Rokoff's. Tarzan did not disturb him, but the following morning he narrated the happenings of the previous evening, omitting not a single detail.

"What a fool I have been," he concluded. "De Coude and his wife were both my friends. How have I returned their friendship? Barely did I escape murdering the count. I have cast a stigma on the name of a good woman. It is very probable that I have broken up a happy home."

"Do you love Olga de Coude?" asked D'Arnot.

"Were I not positive that she does not love me I could not answer your question, Paul; but without disloyalty to her I tell you that I do not love her, nor does she love me. For an instant we were the victims of a sudden madness--it was not love--and it would have left us, unharmed, as suddenly as it had come upon us even though De Coude had not returned. As you know, I have had little experience of women. Olga de Coude is very beautiful; that, and the dim light and the seductive surroundings, and the appeal of the defenseless for protection, might have been resisted by a more civilized man, but my civilization is not even skin deep--it does not go deeper than my clothes.

"Paris is no place for me. I will but continue to stumble into more and more serious pitfalls. The man-made restrictions are irksome. I feel always that I am a prisoner. I cannot endure it, my friend, and so I think that I shall go back to my own jungle, and lead the life that God intended that I should lead when He put me there."

"Do not take it so to heart, Jean," responded D'Arnot. "You have acquitted yourself much better than most 'civilized' men would have under similar circumstances. As to leaving Paris at this time, I rather think that Raoul de Coude may be expected to have something to say on that subject before long."

Nor was D'Arnot mistaken. A week later on Monsieur Flaubert was announced about eleven in the morning, as D'Arnot and Tarzan were breakfasting. Monsieur Flaubert was an impressively polite gentleman. With many low bows he delivered Monsieur le Count de Coude's challenge to Monsieur Tarzan. Would monsieur be so very kind as to arrange to have a friend meet Monsieur Flaubert at as early an hour as convenient, that the details might be arranged to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned?

Certainly. Monsieur Tarzan would be delighted to place his interests unreservedly in the hands of his friend, Lieutenant D'Arnot. And so it was arranged that D'Arnot was to call on Monsieur Flaubert at two that afternoon, and the polite Monsieur Flaubert, with many bows, left them.

When they were again alone D'Arnot looked quizzically at Tarzan.

"Well?" he said.

"Now to my sins I must add murder, or else myself be killed," said Tarzan. "I am progressing rapidly in the ways of my civilized brothers."

"What weapons shall you select?" asked D'Arnot. "De Coude is accredited with being a master with the sword, and a splendid shot."

"I might then choose poisoned arrows at twenty paces, or spears at the same distance," laughed Tarzan. "Make it pistols, Paul."

"He will kill you, Jean."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Tarzan. "I must die some day."

"We had better make it swords," said D'Arnot. "He will be satisfied with wounding you, and there is less danger of a mortal wound." "Pistols," said Tarzan, with finality.

D'Arnot tried to argue him out of it, but without avail, so pistols it was.

D'Arnot returned from his conference with Monsieur Flaubert shortly after four.

"It is all arranged," he said. "Everything is satisfactory. Tomorrow morning at daylight--there is a secluded spot on the road not far from Etamps. For some personal reason Monsieur Flaubert preferred it. I did not demur."

"Good!" was Tarzan's only comment. He did not refer to the matter again even indirectly. That night he wrote several letters before he retired. After sealing and addressing them he placed them all in an envelope addressed to D'Arnot. As he undressed D'Arnot heard him humming a music-hall ditty.

The Frenchman swore under his breath. He was very unhappy, for he was positive that when the sun rose the next morning it would look down upon a dead Tarzan. It grated upon him to see Tarzan so unconcerned.

"This is a most uncivilized hour for people to kill each other," remarked the ape-man when he had been routed out of a comfortable bed in the blackness of the early morning hours. He had slept well, and so it seemed that his head scarcely

touched the pillow ere his man deferentially aroused him. His remark was addressed to D'Arnot, who stood fully dressed in the doorway of Tarzan's bedroom.

D'Arnot had scarcely slept at all during the night. He was nervous, and therefore inclined to be irritable.

"I presume you slept like a baby all night," he said.

Tarzan laughed. "From your tone, Paul, I infer that you rather harbor the fact against me. I could not help it, really."

"No, Jean; it is not that," replied D'Arnot, himself smiling. "But you take the entire matter with such infernal indifference--it is exasperating. One would think that you were going out to shoot at a target, rather than to face one of the best shots in France."

Tarzan shrugged his shoulders. "I am going out to expiate a great wrong, Paul. A very necessary feature of the expiation is the marksmanship of my opponent. Wherefore, then, should I be dissatisfied? Have you not yourself told me that Count de Coude is a splendid marksman?"

"You mean that you hope to be killed?" exclaimed D'Arnot, in horror.

"I cannot say that I hope to be; but you must admit that there is little reason to believe that I shall not be killed."

Had D'Arnot known the thing that was in the ape-man's mind--that had been in his mind almost from the first intimation that De Coude would call him to account on the field of honor--he would have been even more horrified than he was.

In silence they entered D'Arnot's great car, and in similar silence they sped over the dim road that leads to Etamps. Each man was occupied with his own thoughts. D'Arnot's were very mournful, for he was genuinely fond of Tarzan. The great friendship which had sprung up between these two men whose lives and training had been so widely different had but been strengthened by association, for they were both men to whom the same high ideals of manhood, of personal courage, and of honor appealed with equal force. They could understand one another, and each could be proud of the friendship of the other.

Tarzan of the Apes was wrapped in thoughts of the past; pleasant memories of the happier occasions of his lost jungle life. He recalled the countless boyhood hours that he had spent cross-legged upon the table in his dead father's cabin, his little brown body bent over one of the fascinating picture books from which,

unaided, he had gleaned the secret of the printed language long before the sounds of human speech fell upon his ears. A smile of contentment softened his strong face as he thought of that day of days that he had had alone with Jane Porter in the heart of his primeval forest.

Presently his reminiscences were broken in upon by the stopping of the car--they were at their destination. Tarzan's mind returned to the affairs of the moment. He knew that he was about to die, but there was no fear of death in him. To a denizen of the cruel jungle death is a commonplace. The first law of nature compels them to cling tenaciously to life--to fight for it; but it does not teach them to fear death.

D'Arnot and Tarzan were first upon the field of honor. A moment later De Coude, Monsieur Flaubert, and a third gentleman arrived. The last was introduced to D'Arnot and Tarzan; he was a physician.

D'Arnot and Monsieur Flaubert spoke together in whispers for a brief time. The Count de Coude and Tarzan stood apart at opposite sides of the field. Presently the seconds summoned them. D'Arnot and Monsieur Flaubert had examined both pistols. The two men who were to face each other a moment later stood silently while Monsieur Flaubert recited the conditions they were to observe.

They were to stand back to back. At a signal from Monsieur Flaubert they were to walk in opposite directions, their pistols hanging by their sides. When each had proceeded ten paces D'Arnot was to give the final signal--then they were to turn and fire at will until one fell, or each had expended the three shots allowed.

While Monsieur Flaubert spoke Tarzan selected a cigarette from his case, and lighted it. De Coude was the personification of coolness--was he not the best shot in France?

Presently Monsieur Flaubert nodded to D'Arnot, and each man placed his principal in position.

"Are you quite ready, gentlemen?" asked Monsieur Flaubert.

"Quite," replied De Coude.

Tarzan nodded. Monsieur Flaubert gave the signal. He and D'Arnot stepped back a few paces to be out of the line of fire as the men paced slowly apart. Six! Seven! Eight! There were tears in D'Arnot's eyes. He loved Tarzan very much. Nine! Another pace, and the poor lieutenant gave the signal he so hated to give. To him it sounded the doom of his best friend.

Quickly De Coude wheeled and fired. Tarzan gave a little start. His pistol still dangled at his side. De Coude hesitated, as though waiting to see his antagonist crumple to the ground. The Frenchman was too experienced a marksman not to know that he had scored a hit. Still Tarzan made no move to raise his pistol. De Coude fired once more, but the attitude of the ape-man--the utter indifference that was so apparent in every line of the nonchalant ease of his giant figure, and the even unruffled puffing of his cigarette--had disconcerted the best marksman in France. This time Tarzan did not start, but again De Coude knew that he had hit.

Suddenly the explanation leaped to his mind--his antagonist was coolly taking these terrible chances in the hope that he would receive no staggering wound from any of De Coude's three shots. Then he would take his own time about shooting De Coude down deliberately, coolly, and in cold blood. A little shiver ran up the Frenchman's spine. It was fiendish--diabolical. What manner of creature was this that could stand complacently with two bullets in him, waiting for the third?

And so De Coude took careful aim this time, but his nerve was gone, and he made a clean miss. Not once had Tarzan raised his pistol hand from where it hung beside his leg.

For a moment the two stood looking straight into each other's eyes. On Tarzan's face was a pathetic expression of disappointment. On De Coude's a rapidly growing expression of horror--yes, of terror.

He could endure it no longer.

"Mother of God! Monsieur--shoot!" he screamed.

But Tarzan did not raise his pistol. Instead, he advanced toward De Coude, and when D'Arnot and Monsieur Flaubert, misinterpreting his intention, would have rushed between them, he raised his left hand in a sign of remonstrance.

"Do not fear," he said to them, "I shall not harm him."

It was most unusual, but they halted. Tarzan advanced until he was quite close to De Coude.

"There must have been something wrong with monsieur's pistol," he said. "Or monsieur is unstrung. Take mine, monsieur, and try again," and Tarzan offered his pistol, butt foremost, to the astonished De Coude.

"MON DIEU, monsieur!" cried the latter. "Are you mad?"

"No, my friend," replied the ape-man; "but I deserve to die. It is the only way in which I may atone for the wrong I have done a very good woman. Take my pistol and do as I bid."

"It would be murder," replied De Coude. "But what wrong did you do my wife? She swore to me that--"

"I do not mean that," said Tarzan quickly. "You saw all the wrong that passed between us. But that was enough to cast a shadow upon her name, and to ruin the happiness of a man against whom I had no enmity. The fault was all mine, and so I hoped to die for it this morning. I am disappointed that monsieur is not so wonderful a marksman as I had been led to believe."

"You say that the fault was all yours?" asked De Coude eagerly.

"All mine, monsieur. Your wife is a very pure woman. She loves only you. The fault that you saw was all mine. The thing that brought me there was no fault of either the Countess de Coude or myself. Here is a paper which will quite positively demonstrate that," and Tarzan drew from his pocket the statement Rokoff had written and signed.

De Coude took it and read. D'Arnot and Monsieur Flaubert had drawn near. They were interested spectators of this strange ending of a strange duel. None spoke until De Coude had quite finished, then he looked up at Tarzan.

"You are a very brave and chivalrous gentleman," he said. "I thank God that I did not kill you."

De Coude was a Frenchman. Frenchmen are impulsive. He threw his arms about Tarzan and embraced him. Monsieur Flaubert embraced D'Arnot. There was no one to embrace the doctor. So possibly it was pique which prompted him to interfere, and demand that he be permitted to dress Tarzan's wounds.

"This gentleman was hit once at least," he said. "Possibly thrice."

"Twice," said Tarzan. "Once in the left shoulder, and again in the left side--both flesh wounds, I think." But the doctor insisted upon stretching him upon the sward, and tinkering with him until the wounds were cleansed and the flow of blood checked.

One result of the duel was that they all rode back to Paris together in D'Arnot's car, the best of friends. De Coude was so relieved to have had this double assurance of his wife's loyalty that he felt no rancor at all toward Tarzan. It is true that the latter had assumed much more of the fault than was rightly his, but

if he lied a little he may be excused, for he lied in the service of a woman, and he lied like a gentleman.

The ape-man was confined to his bed for several days. He felt that it was foolish and unnecessary, but the doctor and D'Arnot took the matter so to heart that he gave in to please them, though it made him laugh to think of it.

"It is droll," he said to D'Arnot. "To lie abed because of a pin prick! Why, when Bolgani, the king gorilla, tore me almost to pieces, while I was still but a little boy, did I have a nice soft bed to lie on? No, only the damp, rotting vegetation of the jungle. Hidden beneath some friendly bush I lay for days and weeks with only Kala to nurse me--poor, faithful Kala, who kept the insects from my wounds and warned off the beasts of prey.

"When I called for water she brought it to me in her own mouth--the only way she knew to carry it. There was no sterilized gauze, there was no antiseptic bandage--there was nothing that would not have driven our dear doctor mad to have seen. Yet I recovered--recovered to lie in bed because of a tiny scratch that one of the jungle folk would scarce realize unless it were upon the end of his nose."

But the time was soon over, and before he realized it Tarzan found himself abroad again. Several times De Coude had called, and when he found that Tarzan was anxious for employment of some nature he promised to see what could be done to find a berth for him.

It was the first day that Tarzan was permitted to go out that he received a message from De Coude requesting him to call at the count's office that afternoon.

He found De Coude awaiting him with a very pleasant welcome, and a sincere congratulation that he was once more upon his feet. Neither had ever mentioned the duel or the cause of it since that morning upon the field of honor.

"I think that I have found just the thing for you, Monsieur Tarzan," said the count. "It is a position of much trust and responsibility, which also requires considerably physical courage and prowess. I cannot imagine a man better fitted than you, my dear Monsieur Tarzan, for this very position. It will necessitate travel, and later it may lead to a very much better post--possibly in the diplomatic service.

"At first, for a short time only, you will be a special agent in the service of the ministry of war. Come, I will take you to the gentleman who will be your chief. He can explain the duties better than I, and then you will be in a position to judge if you wish to accept or no."

De Coude himself escorted Tarzan to the office of General Rochere, the chief of the bureau to which Tarzan would be attached if he accepted the position. There the count left him, after a glowing description to the general of the many attributes possessed by the ape-man which should fit him for the work of the service.

A half hour later Tarzan walked out of the office the possessor of the first position he had ever held. On the morrow he was to return for further instructions, though General Rochere had made it quite plain that Tarzan might prepare to leave Paris for an almost indefinite period, possibly on the morrow.

It was with feelings of the keenest elation that he hastened home to bear the good news to D'Arnot. At last he was to be of some value in the world. He was to earn money, and, best of all, to travel and see the world.

He could scarcely wait to get well inside D'Arnot's sitting room before he burst out with the glad tidings. D'Arnot was not so pleased.

"It seems to delight you to think that you are to leave Paris, and that we shall not see each other for months, perhaps. Tarzan, you are a most ungrateful beast!" and D'Arnot laughed.

"No, Paul; I am a little child. I have a new toy, and I am tickled to death."

And so it came that on the following day Tarzan left Paris en route for Marseilles and Oran.