

## CHAPTER 1

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### **The Affair on the Ocean Liner**

“*Magnifique!*” exclaimed the Countess de Coude under her breath to her husband, who was absorbed in a book.

“Eh? What is so magnificent?” questioned the Count, glancing over to her.

“Oh, nothing at all, my dear,” replied the Countess, blushing slightly. “I was but recalling with admiration those stupendous ‘skyscrapers’ of New York.” Her husband found that odd; he remembered that when she had first gazed at the New York skyline, she called the tall buildings ‘horrid.’ The Countess settled back in her chair and resumed reading a magazine.

Presently the Count put down his book. “This is tiresome, Olga. I think that I shall see if anyone wants to play cards.”

“You are not very gallant, my husband,” replied the young woman, smiling, “but as I am equally bored, I can forgive you. Go and play at your tiresome old cards, then, if you will.”

When he had gone, she let her eyes wander slyly to the figure of a tall young man stretched lazily in a nearby chair.

*"Magnifique!"* she breathed once more.

The Countess Olga de Coude was twenty, her husband forty. While she was a very loyal wife, the marriage had been arranged by her father. She was not passionately in love, and while her thoughts remained faithful, this young man was still nice to look at.

As she furtively watched him, he rose to leave the deck. The Countess de Coude called to a passing steward. "Who is that gentleman?" she asked.

"He is booked, Madame, as Monsieur Tarzan, of Africa," replied the steward.

"Rather a large estate," she thought, with greater interest.

Tarzan walked slowly toward the smoking-room, and observed two men whispering excitedly just outside. He would have ignored them, except that one sent a guilty look in his direction. Both had dark hair and evil expressions, reminding him of the villains he had seen in plays in Paris. He entered the smoking-room, sat down by himself, and ordered a cocktail. He was in no mood for conversation, and let his mind run sorrowfully over the past few weeks.

He had often wondered about his decision to renounce his birthright. While he liked William Cecil Clayton, Lord Greystoke, it was not for

Clayton's sake that Tarzan had given up his rightful heritage. He owed Clayton nothing. He gave it up for Jane, the woman both men loved, and whom a twist of fate had given to Clayton. Tarzan was devoted to her happiness, and he had learned about civilized persons: they greatly valued money and position and could not tolerate life without them. To take these from Clayton would also have taken them from Jane.

Tarzan could do nothing that would plunge Jane Porter, born to both money and position, into hardship. The notion that she might desert Clayton if he lost his title and estates never crossed his mind, for he credited others with his own brand of simple loyalty—and in Jane's case at least, he was right. She would have remained by her husband's side through any such misfortune.

Tarzan's thoughts drifted to the future. He tried to look forward to his return to the cruel, fierce jungle where he had spent twenty of his twenty-two years. But who would welcome his return? No one. Only Tantor, the elephant, could he call his friend. The others would hunt him or flee from him, as before; not even the apes of his own tribe would befriend him. Civilization had changed him, taught him to want companionship. A world without friends—with no one to talk to—would be joyless.

As he sat thinking, he happened to glance into a mirror on the wall and saw four men playing cards at a table behind him. One left, and then

another approached, courteously offering to fill the vacant chair so that the game might continue. Tarzan was interested, for the newcomer was the smaller of the two he had seen skulking just outside the smoking-room. The ape-man examined the players, but he knew the name of only one: Count Raoul de Coude, whom an over-attentive steward had pointed out as a high official in the French Ministry of War.

Now the other swarthy plotter had entered, and was standing behind de Coude's chair. All Tarzan's attention was on him. The man looked furtively about, but did not notice Tarzan's reflected scrutiny. He took something out of his pocket, palming it. Slowly the hand approached the Count, and then deftly transferred it into the Count's pocket. The man remained standing where he could watch the Frenchman's cards, closely watched by Tarzan.

The game went on for some ten more minutes, until the Count won a considerable wager from the conspirator. Then Tarzan saw the fellow behind the Count's chair nod to his accomplice, who instantly arose and pointed a finger at the nobleman.

"Had I known that Monsieur was a professional card shark, I would not have joined the game," he said.

Instantly the Count and the two other players were on their feet. De Coude's face went white.

“What do you mean, sir?” he cried. “Do you know to whom you speak?”

“I speak to one who cheats at cards,” replied the fellow.

De Coude leaned across the table and slapped the man full in the mouth. The others separated them. “There is some mistake, sir,” cried one. “Why, this is Count de Coude, of France. He would not cheat.”

“If I am mistaken,” said the accuser, “I shall gladly apologize. But first let Monsieur le Count explain the extra cards which I saw him drop into his side pocket.”

Then the man whom Tarzan had seen plant those cards turned to sneak from the room. To his annoyance, he found the exit barred by a tall, gray-eyed stranger.

“Pardon,” said the man roughly, attempting to pass to one side.

“Wait,” said Tarzan.

“But why, Monsieur?” exclaimed the other petulantly. “Let me pass.”

“Wait,” said Tarzan. “I think that you may be able to explain something here.”

The fellow now lost his temper, cursed Tarzan, and tried to push him to one side. The ape-man smiled as he twisted the big fellow about, grasped him by his coat collar and escorted him back to the table, struggling and swearing in futile complaint. It was Nikolai Rokoff’s first experience

with the muscles that had brought down Numa, the lion, and Terkoz, the great bull ape.

The other card players stood looking expectantly at the Count. Several other passengers were now watching to see the outcome.

"The fellow is crazy," said de Coude. "Gentlemen, I implore that one of you search me."

"The accusation is ridiculous," said one of the players.

"You have but to inspect Monsieur's coat pocket and you will see that the accusation is quite serious," insisted the accuser. And then, as the others still hesitated: "Come, I shall do it myself if no one else will," and he stepped forward.

"No, Monsieur," said de Coude. "I will submit to a search only at the hands of a gentleman."

"It is unnecessary to search the Count," said a tall onlooker. "The cards are in his pocket. I myself saw them placed there."

They all turned in surprise. They saw a very well-built young man urging a resisting captive toward them by the scruff of his neck.

"It is a conspiracy," cried de Coude angrily. "There are no cards in my coat," and with that he ran his hand into his pocket. As he did so, tense silence settled over the little group.

The French nobleman went dead white, and then very slowly he withdrew his hand, and in it were three cards. He looked at them in horrified surprise. Expressions of pity and contempt tinged

the features of those who were watching the death of a man's honor.

"It is a conspiracy, Monsieur." It was the gray-eyed stranger who spoke. "Gentlemen," he continued, "the cards were placed there without Monsieur le Count's knowledge as he sat at play. I saw it all in the mirror; this person, who I intercepted in the act of escaping, placed the cards in Monsieur's pocket."

De Coude glanced from Tarzan to the evil-looking man in his grasp.

"*Mon dieu*, Nikolai!" he cried. "You?"

Then the Count turned to the man who had accused him of cheating, and eyed him intently for a moment. "And you, Monsieur. I did not recognize you without your beard. It quite disguises you, Paulvitch. It is quite clear, gentlemen."

"What shall we do with them, Monsieur?" asked Tarzan. "Turn them over to the captain?"

"No, my friend," said the Count hastily. "It is a personal matter, and I beg that you will let it drop. It is enough that I am proven innocent, and the less we have to do with these fellows, the better. But, Monsieur, how can I thank you for the great kindness you have done me? Please accept my card, and if ever I may serve you, I am yours to command."

Tarzan released Rokoff, who made a hasty exit with his confederate Paulvitch. Just as he was leaving, Rokoff turned to Tarzan and spoke in a low voice. "Monsieur will regret his interference."

Tarzan smiled. Bowing to de Coude, he handed

him his own card.

The Count read:

M. JEAN C. TARZAN

“Monsieur Tarzan may indeed wish that he had never befriended me,” said the count, “for I can assure him that he has made enemies of two of the worst scoundrels in all Europe. Avoid them, Monsieur, by all means.”

“I have had more awe-inspiring enemies, my dear Count,” replied Tarzan with a quiet smile, “yet I am still alive and unworried. I doubt they can harm me.”

“Let us hope not, Monsieur,” said de Coude; “but be watchful. You have made at least one unforgiving enemy today. To call Nikolai Rokoff a devil would be to insult Satan.”

That night as Tarzan entered his cabin he found a folded note that had been pushed beneath the door. He opened it and read:

M. TARZAN:

Doubtless you did not realize the seriousness of your offense, or you would not have done as you did today. I am willing to believe that you acted in ignorance. For this reason I shall gladly permit you to offer an apology, and on receiving your promise not to again interfere in affairs that do not concern you, I shall drop the matter.

Otherwise . . . but I am sure that you will see the wisdom of adopting the course I suggest.

Very respectfully,

NIKOLAI ROKOFF



Tarzan permitted himself a moment's grim smile, then promptly forgot about the matter and went to bed.

In a nearby cabin, the Countess de Coude was speaking to her husband. "Why so grave, my dear Raoul?" she asked. "You have been so glum all evening. What worries you?"

"Olga, Nikolai Rokoff is on board. Did you know it?"

"Nikolai!" she exclaimed. "But it cannot be, Raoul. Nikolai is under arrest in Germany."

"So I thought myself until I saw him today with that other arch-scoundrel, Paulvitch. Olga, I cannot endure his persecution much longer—not even for you. Sooner or later I shall turn him over to the authorities. I am half minded to explain the situation to the captain before we land. On a French liner it would be an easy matter, Olga, to permanently end this problem of ours," he finished grimly.

"Oh, no, Raoul!" cried the Countess, sinking to her knees before him as he sat on the sofa. "Remember your promise to me. Tell me, Raoul, that you will not do that. Do not even threaten him, Raoul."

De Coude took his wife's hands in his and gazed on her troubled face for some time before he spoke.

"As you wish, Olga," he said at length. "I cannot understand. He has forfeited all claim to your love, loyalty, or respect. He is a menace to

your life and honor, and that of your husband. I hope you will never regret this defense of him.”

“I do not defend him, Raoul,” she interrupted vehemently. “I hate him as much as you do, but—oh, Raoul, blood is thicker than water.”

“I would today have liked to see his blood,” growled de Coude grimly. “They conspired to stain my honor, Olga.”

He told her all that had happened. “Had it not been for this utter stranger, they would have succeeded, for who would have accepted my unsupported word against the damning evidence of those hidden cards? I had almost begun to doubt myself when this Monsieur Tarzan dragged your precious Nikolai before us, and explained the whole cowardly transaction.”

“Monsieur Tarzan?” asked the Countess, in evident surprise.

“Yes. Do you know him, Olga?”

“I have seen him. A steward pointed him out to me.”

“I did not know that he was a celebrity,” said the Count.

Olga de Coude changed the subject. She might find it difficult to explain just why the steward had pointed out the handsome Monsieur Tarzan to her. Perhaps her husband read it in her face, for his expression seemed curious. “Ah,” she thought to herself, “a guilty conscience is a very suspicious thing.”