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[Authors](#)
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[The Return of Tarzan](#)

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This Book:

[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 3 - What Happened in the Rue Maule

On his arrival in Paris, Tarzan had gone directly to the apartments of his old friend, D'Arnot, where the naval lieutenant had scored him roundly for his decision to renounce the title and estates that were rightly his from his father, John Clayton, the late Lord Greystoke.

"You must be mad, my friend," said D'Arnot, "thus lightly to give up not alone wealth and position, but an opportunity to prove beyond doubt to all the world that in your veins flows the noble blood of two of England's most honored houses--instead of the blood of a savage she-ape. It is incredible that they could have believed you--Miss Porter least of all.

"Why, I never did believe it, even back in the wilds of your African jungle, when you tore the raw meat of your kills with mighty jaws, like some wild beast, and wiped your greasy hands upon your thighs. Even then, before there was the slightest proof to the contrary, I knew that you were mistaken in the belief that Kala was your mother.

"And now, with your father's diary of the terrible life led by him and your mother on that wild African shore; with the account of your birth, and, final and most convincing proof of all, your own baby finger prints upon the pages of it, it seems incredible to me that you are willing to remain a nameless, penniless vagabond."

"I do not need any better name than Tarzan," replied the ape-man; "and as for remaining a penniless vagabond, I have no intention of so doing. In fact, the next, and let us hope the last, burden that I shall be forced to put upon your unselfish friendship will be the finding of employment for me."

"Pooh, pooh!" scoffed D'Arnot. "You know that I did not mean that. Have I not told you a dozen times that I have enough for twenty men, and that half of what I have is yours? And if I gave it all to you, would it represent even the tenth part of the value I place upon your friendship, my Tarzan? Would it repay the services you did me in Africa? I do not forget, my friend, that but for you and your wondrous bravery I had died at the stake in the village of Mbonga's cannibals. Nor do I forget that to your self-sacrificing devotion I owe the fact that I recovered from the terrible wounds I received at their hands--I discovered later something of what it meant to you to remain with me in the amphitheater of apes while your heart was urging you on to the coast.

"When we finally came there, and found that Miss Porter and her party had left, I commenced to realize something of what you had done for an utter stranger. Nor am I trying to repay you with money, Tarzan. It is that just at present you need money; were it sacrifice that I might offer you it were the same--my friendship must always be yours, because our tastes are similar, and I admire you. That I cannot command, but the money I can and shall."

"Well," laughed Tarzan, "we shall not quarrel over the money. I must live, and so I must have it; but I shall be more contented with something to do. You cannot show me your friendship in a more convincing manner than to find employment for me--I shall die of inactivity in a short while. As for my birthright--it is in good hands. Clayton is not guilty of robbing me of it. He truly believes that he is the real Lord Greystoke, and the chances are that he will make a better English lord than a man who was born and raised in an African jungle. You know that I am but half civilized even now. Let me see red in anger but for a moment, and all the instincts of the savage beast that I really am, submerge what little I possess of the milder ways of culture and refinement.

"And then again, had I declared myself I should have robbed the woman I love of the wealth and position that her marriage to Clayton will now insure to her. I could not have done that--could I, Paul?

"Nor is the matter of birth of great importance to me," he went on, without waiting for a reply. "Raised as I have been, I see no worth in man or beast that is not theirs by virtue of their own mental or physical prowess. And so I am as happy to think of Kala as my mother as I would be to try to picture the poor, unhappy little English girl who passed away a year after she bore me. Kala was always kind to me in her fierce and savage way. I must have nursed at her hairy breast from the time that my own mother died. She fought for me against the wild denizens of the forest, and against the savage members of our tribe, with the ferocity of real mother love.

"And I, on my part, loved her, Paul. I did not realize how much until after the cruel spear and the poisoned arrow of Mbonga's black warrior had stolen her away from me. I was still a child when that occurred, and I threw myself upon her dead body and wept out my anguish as a child might for his own mother. To you, my friend, she would have appeared a hideous and ugly creature, but to me she was beautiful--so gloriously does love transfigure its object. And so I am perfectly content to remain forever the son of Kala, the she-ape."

"I do not admire you the less for your loyalty," said D'Arnot, "but the time will come when you will be glad to claim your own. Remember what I say, and let us hope that it will be as easy then as it is now. You must bear in mind that Professor Porter and Mr. Philander are the only people in the world who can swear that the little skeleton found in the cabin with those of your father and mother was that of an infant anthropoid ape, and not the offspring of Lord and Lady Greystoke. That evidence is most important. They are both old men. They may not live many years longer. And then, did it not occur to you that once Miss Porter knew the truth she would break her engagement with Clayton? You might easily have your title, your estates, and the woman you love, Tarzan. Had you not thought of that?"

Tarzan shook his head. "You do not know her," he said. "Nothing could bind her closer to her bargain than some misfortune to Clayton. She is from an old southern family in America, and southerners pride themselves upon their loyalty."

Tarzan spent the two following weeks renewing his former brief acquaintance with Paris. In the daytime he haunted the libraries and picture galleries. He had become an omnivorous reader, and the world of possibilities that were opened to him in this seat of culture and learning fairly appalled him when he contemplated the very infinitesimal crumb of the sum total of human knowledge that a single individual might hope to acquire even after a lifetime of study and research; but he learned what he could by day, and threw himself into a search for relaxation and amusement at night. Nor did he find Paris a whit less fertile field for his nocturnal avocation.

If he smoked too many cigarettes and drank too much absinth it was because he took civilization as he found it, and did the things that he found his civilized brothers doing. The life was a new and alluring one, and in addition he had a sorrow in his breast and a great longing which he knew could never be fulfilled, and so he sought in study and in dissipation--the two extremes--to forget the past and inhibit contemplation of the future.

He was sitting in a music hall one evening, sipping his absinth and admiring the art of a certain famous Russian dancer, when he caught a passing glimpse of a pair of evil black eyes upon him. The man turned and was lost in the crowd at the exit before Tarzan could catch a good look at him, but he was confident that he had seen those

eyes before and that they had been fastened to him this evening through no passing accident. He had had the uncanny feeling for some time that he was being watched, and it was in response to this animal instinct that was strong within him that he had turned suddenly and surprised the eyes in the very act of watching him.

Before he left the music hall the matter had been forgotten, nor did he notice the swarthy individual who stepped deeper into the shadows of an opposite doorway as Tarzan emerged from the brilliantly lighted amusement hall.

Had Tarzan but known it, he had been followed many times from this and other places of amusement, but seldom if ever had he been alone. Tonight D'Arnot had had another engagement, and Tarzan had come by himself.

As he turned in the direction he was accustomed to taking from this part of Paris to his apartments, the watcher across the street ran from his hiding-place and hurried on ahead at a rapid pace.

Tarzan had been wont to traverse the Rue Maule on his way home at night. Because it was very quiet and very dark it reminded him more of his beloved African jungle than did the noisy and garish streets surrounding it. If you are familiar with your Paris you will recall the narrow, forbidding precincts of the Rue Maule. If you are not, you need but ask the police about it to learn that in all Paris there is no street to which you should give a wider berth after dark.

On this night Tarzan had proceeded some two squares through the dense shadows of the squalid old tenements which line this dismal way when he was attracted by screams and cries for help from the third floor of an opposite building. The voice was a woman's. Before the echoes of her first cries had died Tarzan was bounding up the stairs and through the dark corridors to her rescue.

At the end of the corridor on the third landing a door stood slightly ajar, and from within Tarzan heard again the same appeal that had lured him from the street. Another instant found him in the center of a dimly-lighted room. An oil lamp burned upon a high, old-fashioned mantel, casting its dim rays over a dozen repulsive figures. All but one were men. The other was a woman of about thirty. Her face, marked by low passions and dissipation, might once have been lovely. She stood with one hand at her throat, crouching against the farther wall.

"Help, monsieur," she cried in a low voice as Tarzan entered the room; "they were killing me."

As Tarzan turned toward the men about him he saw the crafty, evil faces of habitual criminals. He wondered that they had made no effort to escape. A movement behind him caused him to turn. Two things his eyes saw, and one of them caused him considerable wonderment. A man was sneaking stealthily from the room, and in the brief glance that Tarzan had of him he saw that it was Rokoff. But the other thing that he saw was of more immediate interest. It was a great brute of a fellow tiptoeing upon him from behind with a huge bludgeon in his hand, and then, as the man and his confederates saw that he was discovered, there was a concerted rush upon Tarzan from all sides. Some of the men drew knives. Others picked up chairs, while the fellow with the bludgeon raised it high above his head in a mighty swing that would have crushed Tarzan's head had it ever descended upon it.

But the brain, and the agility, and the muscles that had coped with the mighty strength and cruel craftiness of Terkoz and Numa in the fastness of their savage jungle were not to be so easily subdued as these apaches of Paris had believed.

Selecting his most formidable antagonist, the fellow with the bludgeon, Tarzan charged full upon him, dodging the falling weapon, and catching the man a terrific blow on the point of the chin that felled him in his tracks.

Then he turned upon the others. This was sport. He was reveling in the joy of battle and the lust of blood. As though it had been but a brittle shell, to break at the least rough usage, the thin veneer of his civilization fell from him, and the ten burly villains found themselves penned in a small room with a wild and savage beast, against whose steel muscles their puny strength was less than futile.

At the end of the corridor without stood Rokoff, waiting the outcome of the affair. He wished to be sure that Tarzan was dead before he left, but it was not a part of his plan to be one of those within the room when the murder occurred.

The woman still stood where she had when Tarzan entered, but her face had undergone a number of changes with the few minutes which had elapsed. From the semblance of distress which it had worn when Tarzan first saw it, it had changed to one of craftiness as he had wheeled to meet the attack from behind; but the change Tarzan had not seen.

Later an expression of surprise and then one of horror superseded the others. And who may wonder. For the immaculate gentleman her cries had lured to what was to have been his death had been suddenly metamorphosed into a demon of revenge. Instead of soft muscles and a weak resistance, she was looking upon a veritable Hercules gone mad.

"MON DIEU!" she cried; "he is a beast!" For the strong, white teeth of the ape-man had found the throat of one of his assailants, and Tarzan fought as he had learned to fight with the great bull apes of the tribe of Kerchak.

He was in a dozen places at once, leaping hither and thither about the room in sinuous bounds that reminded the woman of a panther she had seen at the zoo. Now a wrist-bone snapped in his iron grip, now a shoulder was wrenched from its socket as he forced a victim's arm backward and upward.

With shrieks of pain the men escaped into the hallway as quickly as they could; but even before the first one staggered, bleeding and broken, from the room, Rokoff had seen enough to convince him that Tarzan would not be the one to lie dead in that house this night, and so the Russian had hastened to a nearby den and telephoned the police that a man was committing murder on the third floor of Rue Maule, 27. When the officers arrived they found three men groaning on the floor, a frightened woman lying upon a filthy bed, her face buried in her arms, and what appeared to be a well-dressed young gentleman standing in the center of the room awaiting the reinforcements which he had thought the footsteps of the officers hurrying up the stairway had announced --but they were mistaken in the last; it was a wild beast that looked upon them through those narrowed lids and steel-gray eyes. With the smell of blood the last vestige of civilization had deserted Tarzan, and now he stood at bay, like a lion surrounded by hunters, awaiting the next overt act, and crouching to charge its author.

"What has happened here?" asked one of the policemen.

Tarzan explained briefly, but when he turned to the woman for confirmation of his statement he was appalled by her reply.

"He lies!" she screamed shrilly, addressing the policeman. "He came to my room while I was alone, and for no good purpose. When I repulsed him he would have killed me had not my screams attracted these gentlemen, who were passing the house at the time. He is a devil, monsieurs; alone he has all but killed ten men with his bare hands and his teeth."

So shocked was Tarzan by her ingratitude that for a moment he was struck dumb. The police were inclined to be a little skeptical, for they had had other dealings with this

same lady and her lovely coterie of gentlemen friends. However, they decided to place all the inmates of the room under arrest, and let another, whose business it was, separate the innocent from the guilty.

But they found that it was one thing to tell this well-dressed young man that he was under arrest, but quite another to enforce it.

"I am guilty of no offense," he said quietly. "I have but sought to defend myself. I do not know why the woman has told you what she has. She can have no enmity against me, for never until I came to this room in response to her cries for help had I seen her."

"Come, come," said one of the officers; "there are judges to listen to all that," and he advanced to lay his hand upon Tarzan's shoulder. An instant later he lay crumpled in a corner of the room, and then, as his comrades rushed in upon the ape-man, they experienced a taste of what the apaches had but recently gone through. So quickly and so roughly did he handle them that they had not even an opportunity to draw their revolvers.

During the brief fight Tarzan had noted the open window and, beyond, the stem of a tree, or a telegraph pole—he could not tell which. As the last officer went down, one of his fellows succeeded in drawing his revolver and, from where he lay on the floor, fired at Tarzan. The shot missed, and before the man could fire again Tarzan had swept the lamp from the mantel and plunged the room into darkness.

The next they saw was a lithe form spring to the sill of the open window and leap, panther-like, onto the pole across the walk. When the police gathered themselves together and reached the street their prisoner was nowhere to be seen.

They did not handle the woman and the men who had not escaped any too gently when they took them to the station; they were a very sore and humiliated detail of police. It galled them to think that it would be necessary to report that a single unarmed man had wiped the floor with the whole lot of them, and then escaped them as easily as though they had not existed.

The officer who had remained in the street swore that no one had leaped from the window or left the building from the time they entered until they had come out. His comrades thought that he lied, but they could not prove it.

When Tarzan found himself clinging to the pole outside the window, he followed his jungle instinct and looked below for enemies before he ventured down. It was well he did, for just beneath stood a policeman. Above, Tarzan saw no one, so he went up instead of down.

The top of the pole was opposite the roof of the building, so it was but the work of an instant for the muscles that had for years sent him hurtling through the treetops of his primeval forest to carry him across the little space between the pole and the roof. From one building he went to another, and so on, with much climbing, until at a cross street he discovered another pole, down which he ran to the ground.

For a square or two he ran swiftly; then he turned into a little all-night cafe and in the lavatory removed the evidences of his over-roof promenade from hands and clothes. When he emerged a few moments later it was to saunter slowly on toward his apartments.

Not far from them he came to a well-lighted boulevard which it was necessary to cross. As he stood directly beneath a brilliant arc light, waiting for a limousine that was approaching to pass him, he heard his name called in a sweet feminine voice. Looking up, he met the smiling eyes of Olga de Coude as she leaned forward upon the back seat of the machine. He bowed very low in response to her friendly greeting. When he straightened up the machine had borne her away.

"Rokoff and the Countess de Coude both in the same evening," he soliloquized; "Paris is not so large, after all."