

Robert L. Robinson, Jr.: *Two Hunters*

The sounds of the Parisian streets trickled through the slightly opened windows in the main office of the Banque Favraux, as street vendors, strolling lovers and the honking horns of new motorists created an opera of sorts. The sweet cascading scents of perfumes, pastries and cigarettes mixed in the air as they formed a new smell, unique to the City of Lights. Within the marble walls of the building, the hum of commerce filled the air as men diligently followed the financial markets in Europe and abroad.

Entering the magnificent building of the bank, in a brisk walk, his large frame covered in a fine overcoat and hat, with the brim over his face, was a man with eyes like those of a beast. They blazed mercilessly at all who met his glance. For weeks, he had lived in the shadows; those who knew him thought him dead. But the time had come for his return. The time had come when justice—or so he believed—must be served. Or more precisely, vengeance would serve in lieu of the justice he craved.

Coldly, the man approached a receptionist, a proud-looking woman who sat behind a desk. Her hair was tightly pulled back in a bun, her face expertly wore the latest in makeup, enhancing rather than detracting; she sat there in her tailored blue dress, her stern, yet beautiful, appearance complementing the décor of the office. She looked up at the man and was not put off by his eyes, as she had seen those kind of eyes almost every day for a year.

“I am here to see Monsieur Favraux,” announced the stranger, handing her his calling card. “I have an appointment. My name...” The man suddenly paused; he had kept his name silent for months. Then, he announced with arrogance: “My name is Nikolas Rokoff.”

The receptionist took his card and placed it on a silver tray, its edges wonderfully ornate, then signaled to an office boy. Upon the simple wave of her hand, the boy—no more than 12—ran over to stand before her.

“Louis,” she ordered the youth, “bring this to Monsieur Vallières. At once.”

The boy walked quickly away.

“You may have a seat, Monsieur Rokoff. It shall be a few moments.”

Rokoff removed his hat and sat in a chair, his eyes always scanning the room, never once stopping. After a short time, the boy came back down. He nodded to the receptionist, who looked at Rokoff. “Monsieur Vallières will meet you upstairs,” she said.

Rokoff rose and followed the boy to the elevator cage.

The boy held the gate open, waiting for the larger man to enter. Once inside, his hands skillfully manipulated the levers, operating the car as they rode together to the top floor of the building.

Neither spoke during the ascent, the boy enjoying the wondrous ride as if it were its first again, Rokoff quietly anticipating the meeting at the top. As they came to a halt, the boy again opened the gate, revealing a gentleman standing before them. His hair and beard betrayed his age as they sparkled shining silver. For an elderly man, he was tall, although slumped over from age; his eyes shone with signs of the youth he once had been. Rokoff exited the elevator. The boy smiled at him before manipulating the levers to bring the car back to the ground floor.

“Monsieur Rokoff,” began the man as he extended his hand, “welcome to the Banque Favraux. I am Monsieur Vallières, personal secretary to Monsieur Favraux. Please, come with me.” The elderly man led Rokoff down the hall to the outer chamber of an office. Knocking once, then opening the door, Vallières entered, with Rokoff following, into the office of Monsieur Favraux.

The huge corner office was one of opulence, fine art and comfortable furnishing filling the room.

“Monsieur Rokoff,” said a voice from behind a large marble desk. “I don’t often meet with strangers.”

Rokoff walked towards the desk. “It is in both of our interest for you to do so, Monsieur Favraux,” replied Rokoff.

“Please sit,” said the banker as he motioned to the chair before his desk. Vallières took the seat beside Rokoff, then opened a leather-bound portfolio to take notes.

“I was under the impression that we would speak alone,” began Rokoff as he glanced at the secretary. “What I have to say is most confidential.”

“Monsieur Vallières is my right hand,” said the banker. “If you want to work with me and make use of my resources, you must learn that he is amongst my most treasured ones. It is that simple. Now, what do you have for me?”

Rokoff rubbed his bald head for a moment as he decided which course of action he would take. He had come too far to back out now. “I believe that there’s an absolute fortune to be found in Africa.”

“That is nothing new. Men every day travel to the dark continent to find their fortunes.”

“Listen to me, Monsieur Favraux, and listen to me well. I’m not a man to be trifled with, nor dismissed casually. I’ve come to you for a simple reason: I need the funds to accomplish two things. Mount an expedition to a city called Opar, and get the services of a certain English Lord to guide us.”

“Then why ask to speak with me? There are men in my employ here who could evaluate your project and make a decision.”

“It’s not that simple. First, only one man knows where Opar is located. I believe that it is the reason for his fortune. And he won’t be easily persuaded. Second, and this is more important for you, the pay-out for this is beyond anything you might imagine. Gold, gems of untold value... We could fill ten ships and still not have dented this treasure.”

Favraux rose from his desk and walked to a bar located along the wall. He reached in and took out a bottle of brandy, of which he poured two glasses. Walking back, he handed one to Rokoff. “Why haven’t you already made this English lord some kind of offer then?” Rokoff raised his glass in thanks to Favraux, and then drained the contents in one swift sip.

“Why? This man is not like you or I. He is a demon, with the strength of ten men. Believe me when I tell you this. I’ve had my hands on his throat, and he’s had his on mine, and we’ve looked into each other’s eyes with hate. I know for sure, he is more beast than man.”

“I wasn’t told you were a madman, Monsieur Rokoff. Our mutual acquaintance, Alexis Paulvitch, said you were a man to be listened to.”

“Then listen to me, you pompous ass. Lord Greystoke is no normal man. He was the son of an English lord, born in Africa and raised by apes. Do you understand what I am saying? He was not raised by men, suckling on the milk of his proper English mother, but at the tit of a hairy ape. He ruled a herd of them, along with a tribe of natives. In the jungle, he is seen as some mystical god... a warrior of unequalled skill and strength. They call him Tarzan.”

“My God,” said Favraux. “I’d heard that story, but I thought it was legend.”

“It is not. I know this man. We’re sworn enemies, but each time he returns from Africa, his estate grows. I paid his banker for information, a man in Switzerland, and he told me that Greystoke’s deposits are all in gold and jewels. And each one larger than the one before it.”

“If this jungle man is your enemy, then how will you get him to lead you to this fortune?”

Rokoff walked to the bar and refilled his glass. “Ah,” he exclaimed, “there is only one thing that makes Greystoke a man and not a beast. His woman. He has a wife and a son. And they’re in Paris as we speak.”

Favraux rubbed his chin, and then looked at his secretary. *It was tempting, he thought, but fantastic.*

“Monsieur Rokoff,” asked Vallières, “if this man hates you, why would he help you?”

“To regain what he wants,” said Rokoff.

“And that would be?” said Vallières.

“His family. I will take his family. You will keep them hidden, until we return with the treasure.”

Favraux stood up. “You ask me to commit a crime, Monsieur Rokoff? Kidnapping, coercion, possibly more. Are you mad? I run a bank!”

“You run more than a bank, Monsieur Favraux. Do not think that I do not know your business. Your fortune was made by stealing from others, throughout Europe. You’ve blackmailed officials, embezzled millions, help the Vampires launder their loot... Yes, you’re more than a banker. But all that doesn’t matter now... the kind of fortune I’m talking about will erase your past, make you as respectable as the families you’ve ruined.”

Vallières’ eyes blazed as he listened to the two men, but he said nothing.

Favraux laughed out loud as he took the bottle from Rokoff’s hand. “Good, we understand each other. Now, where is this ape man?”

Across the City of Lights, at the Royal Palace Hotel, two men stood on a balcony looking out at the skyline. The smaller of the two wore the uniform of the French Navy. His name was Paul d'Arnot. A slim cigarette in his left hand twirled to and fro as he spoke, like the baton of an orchestra conductor. He held a glass of Burgundy in his right hand. Beside d'Arnot was a bronzed god, a full head and half taller, with a body that would rival the sculptures of the Louvre. That was his friend, John Clayton, Lord Greystoke. Paris was a regular stop on the annual trips he took with his wife. "This is a jungle of a different sort, eh, John?" Paul asked his companion. "The predators that come after a man here, come with a smile and a desire unknown to all but them."

"My world was simpler before I met you," said Greystoke. "My enemies were so for no other reason than I was a meal to them, or they were a meal to me. It was easy. No anger, no hatred. Since becoming a civilized man, I have discovered emotions that my brothers, the Great Apes, would find humorous."

"Ah, this is true, but would you have known the wonders of love? To see a rare beauty and know that she is the one for you. Do you think your ape friends know that?"

Greystoke looked out over Paris with his grey eyes, and thought back to his youth, to a love named Teeka, but chose not to mention her. Paul, while he accepted much of his life prior to their friendship, would never understand his love for this beautiful creature. The female who filled his heart with longing, until the day he first saw the golden tresses of the one who would become his mate, his wife, Jane Porter. "No Paul," he replied. "They don't. But neither do you, calling on a different lady every night."

The two men laughed, then sipped their wine in a moment of silence.

"Your wife took your son shopping in Paris," said d'Arnot. "There goes that amazing fortune of yours." It took Greystoke a long time to understand the value of wealth and the importance that other men put on it. He only saw that the jewels of Opar provided him and his family with security.

"Jane should return shortly with her litter carrying her treasure," he laughed. "She loves to hunt in the shops of the Left Bank as I in the jungle. But she left Jack here, with his nanny."

"What a quiet child," said the French Lieutenant. "I did not even know he was here."

"From what I understand, it is common trait among men of my bloodline. My mother told me I never cried as a baby."

"Your mother?" exclaimed d'Arnot. "But I thought she..."

"Kala," said Greystoke gently. "The mother who raised me."

Suddenly, the Jungle Lord turned his head. His eyes narrowed as he tried to identify the source of a sound he had just heard.

"John..." started d'Arnot before a quick hand signal from Tarzan silenced him. Without a word, the civilized man the world knew as Lord Greystoke vanished as the creature called Tarzan of the Apes hurtled off the balcony skyward, scampering towards the rooftops.

He jumped across the span of the boulevard to the roof across the way where a man in black stood tall. He was an imposing figure, as tall as the jungle lord, dressed all in black, with a matching hat covering his face.

"I mean you no harm, Lord Greystoke," said the man in black.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Judex. I'm here to help you. A man whom you believe to be dead is alive, and at this moment, he has taken your wife as his prisoner."

"Rokoff!"

"Yes. Unfortunately, I arrived too late to stop him..." Judex watched Greystoke sizing him up, deciding if he was telling him the truth or not.

"They could be holding her anywhere," muttered Tarzan to himself.

"True," said Judex. "But in this case, they're not. They've taken her to a building near the Moulin Rouge. We must hurry. My car is down there."

The two men swiftly made their way to the street and entered Judex's large, black sedan. The crime-fighter wove his way through the bustling streets of Paris just as Tarzan wove his way across the branches high above the ground of Africa.

"I should have made sure Rokoff was dead," said the Jungle Lord. "Until one of us is dead, he will always threaten my family."

“His goal is two-fold,” said Judex. “Your death, but only after you show him the location of the lost city of Opar.”

“How do you know this? No one knows of Opar.”

“Rokoff does. A man as evil as he named Favraux now does too. But don’t worry, your treasure is your own. I only serve Justice.”

“I care nothing for gold and jewels, only my wife.”

“Then, let us make haste,” said Judex as he drove even faster.

In silence, the two avengers rode, as if on the wings of a chariot to the field of battle. The stars came out as the car slowed behind a warehouse. Judex pointed to a building with a windmill on it. “She is in there. It’s a club with song and dance, which is good for us, as it will cover the noise. Once, it was the center of all society in Paris; now only those chasing a dream go there, and become lost in absinthe. We must go quickly.”

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE BOOK