

COPY

THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S

(Continued)

Into the light. Behind him came a man with a lantern and behind him others.

They were white men, all. Von Blitz turned suddenly and cursed the man with the lantern. The fellow was ready to drop with exhaustion. Evidently it had been no easy task to remove the chests.

CHAPTER XXII.

SEVERAL PHILOSOPHERS.

THE four burly men sat down upon the chests. Von Blitz alone being visible to the watchers. They were fagged to the last extreme.

"Dis is der last," panted Von Blitz, blowing hard and stretching his big arms. "I fix him," he growled. "His time will come, by tam! I let him know he can't take my wives away mit him. Der dog! I fix him some day purdy soon. Und dem tam vilmess! Day run away mit him, eh? Ach, Gott, if I could only put my hands by der necks yet!"

"Vat for you fret, Yacob?" growled one of the Boers. "You couldn't take dose vilmess back by Europ mit you. I tink you got good neck by losing dem. Misdor Chase can't take dem back needer. Don't fret."

"Vell," said Von Blitz, arising, "come on, boys. Dis is der last of dem. Den ve blow der tam ting up. Grab hold dere, Joost. Up mit it, Jan. Vat No?"

"Gott in himmel, Yacob, vat a minutes! My back is broke!" protested Joost stubbornly. Von Blitz swore steadily for a minute, but could not move the impassive Boers.

"Vat are you tink I vant you in en dis, you svine? To set around und dream? Nobody else knows about dis treasures, und ve got it all for ourselves—ve four and no more, und you say, 'Vat's der hurry?' It's all ours. Ve divide it oop in der cave mit all der money ve get from der bank. Vat? Yes? Den, ven der time comes, ve send it all by Australia and no von is der riser. Der natives von't know, und der white peebles von't be alive to care about it."

"I don't like dot scheme to rob der bank," growled Jan. "If der peeples get to us, dey would cut us to pieces."

"But dey von't get on to us, you fool. Dey wouldn't take it demselves if it was handed to dem. Dey're too honest—yes. Vell, don't dey say ve're honest too? Vell, vat more you vant? Dey don't know how much money und rubies dere is in der bank. Ve von't take all of it—und dey von't know der difference. Ve burn der books. Das is all. Ve get in by der bank tonight, boys."

"I don't like id," said Joost. "Id's stealing from our friends, Yacob. Besides, if der oder heirs should go before der government mit der story, vat den?"

"Der oder heirs vill never get der chance, boys. Dey vill die mit der plague—in, ha! Sure! Dese von't be no oder heirs. Rasula says it must be so. Ve can't vat, boys. It vill be years before der business is settled. Ve must get vat ve can now and vat for der decision afterwards. Brodney has wrote to Rasula, saying dat dot Chase feller is to stay here vadder ve vant him or not. He says Chase is a good man! By tam, it makes me cry to tink of vot he has done by me—dot good man!"

To the amazement of all the burly German began to blubber.

"Come on, Yacob," said Jan gruffly. Von Blitz shook his fist at the door across the chamber and thundered his final maledictions.

"Sir John says in der letter to Misdor Chase dere is a movements on foot in London to settle der contest out of court," volunteered Joost.

"Sure, but he also say dat ve all may die mit old age before it is over yet."

"Don't forget der plague!" said Jan. They frowned rightly as they lifted the heavy chests to their shoulders and started for the door.

"Close der door, Jan," commanded Von Blitz from the passage. "Ve vill fight der fuse ven ve haf got beyond der first bend. Vat? Look! By tam, von of you svine has broke der fuse. Vat! Ve vill fix him now."

The door was closed behind them, but the listeners could hear them repairing the damage that Selim had done to the fuse.

Led by Selim, the four made a rush for the door leading into the chateau. They threw it open and passed through, flying as if for their lives. No one could tell how soon an explosion might bring disaster to the region; they put distance between them and the powder keg. Selim paused long enough to drop the bolts and turn the great key with the lever. At the second turn in the narrow corridor he overtook Chase and the scurrying women.

"Is there nothing to be done?" cried the princess. "Can we not prevent the explosion? They will cut off our means of escape in that!"

"I know too much about gunpowder, princess," said Chase dryly, "no fool with it. It's like a mule. It kicks hard. Gad, it was hard to stand there and hear those brutes planning it all and not be able to stop them!"

The princess was once more at his side. He had clasped her arm to lead her securely in the wake of Neenah's electric lantern. She came to a sudden stop.

"And pray Mr. Chase," she said

sharply, as if the thought occurred to her for the first time, "why didn't you stop them? You had the advantage. You and Selim could have surprised them—you could have taken them with out a struggle."

He laughed softly, deprecatingly, not a little impressed by the justice of her criticism.

"No doubt you consider me a coward," he said ruefully.

"You know that I do not," she protested. "I—I can't understand your motive; that is all."

"You forget that I am the representative of these very men. I am the trusted agent of Sir John Brodney, who has refused to supplant me with another. I can't very well represent Sir John and at the same time make prisoners or corpses of his clients, even though I am being shielded by their legal foes. I'll not have Von Blitz saying, even to himself, that I have not only stolen his wives, but have also cast him into the hands of his Philistines. It may sound quixotic to you, but I think that Lord Deppingham and Mr. Browne will understand my attitude."

"But Von Blitz has sworn to kill you," she expostulated, with some heat. "You are wasting your integrity, I must say, Mr. Chase."

"Would you have me shoot him from ambush?" he demanded.

"Not at all. You could have taken him captive and held him safe until the time comes for you to leave the island."

"He would not have been my captive in any event. I could do no more than deliver him into the hands of his enemies. Would that be fair?"

"But he is a thief!"

"No more so than Taswell Skaggs and John Wyckholme, who unquestionably cheated the natives out of the very treasure we have seen carried away. I am not a constable nor a thief catcher. I am a soldier of the defense, not an officer of the crown, at this stage of the game. Today I shall contrive to send word to Rasula that Von Blitz has stolen the treasure chests. Mr. Von Blitz will have a sad time explaining this little defection to his friends. We must not overlook the fact that Lady Deppingham and Robert Browne are quite willing to take everything from the islanders. Everything that Taswell Skaggs and John Wyckholme possessed in this island belongs to them under the terms of the will."

They were at the top of the second flight of stairs by this time and quite a distance from the treasure chamber. His coolness, the absence of any sign of returning sentiment, was puzzling her sorely. Half an hour before she had been carried away, rendered helpless, by the passion that swayed him. Now he spoke and looked as if he had forgotten the result of his storming. Strangely enough, she was piqued. When they came into the well lighted upper corridor he proceeded ruthlessly to upset all of her harsh calculations. He stopped suddenly, stepping directly in front of her. As she drew up in surprise he reached down and took both of her hands in his. For the moment she was too amazed to oppose this sudden action. She looked up into his face, many emotions in her own—reproof, wonder, disavow, hauteur, joy.

"Wait," he said gently. They were quite alone. She saw the most wonderful light in his gray eyes. Her lips parted in quick, timorous confusion.

"I love you. I am sorry for what I did down there. I couldn't help it—nor could you. Yet I took a cruel advantage of you. I know what you've been thinking too. You have been saying to yourself that I wanted to see how far I could go. Don't speak. I know! You are wrong. I've absolutely worshipped you since those first days in Thorberg, wildly, hopelessly, day and night. I was afraid of you—yes, afraid of you because you are a princess. But I've got over all that, Geneva. You are a woman, a living, real woman, with the blood and the heart and the lips that were made for men to crave. I want to tell you this here in the light of day, not in the darkness that hid all the truth in me except that which you might have felt in my kiss."

"Please—please don't," she said once more, her lip trembling, her eyes full of the softness that the woman who loves cannot hide. "You shall not go on! It is wrong!"

"It is not wrong!" he cried hotly. "My love is not wrong. I want you to understand and to believe. I can't hope that you will be my wife. It's too wildly improbable. You are not for such as I. You are pledged to a man of your own world, your own exalted world. But listen, Geneva. See, my eyes call you darling even though my lips dare not. Geneva, I'd give my soul to hear you say that you will be my wife. You do understand how it is with me?"

The delicious sense of possession thrilled her. She glowed with the return of her self esteem, in the restoration of that quality which proclaimed her a princess of the blood. She was sure of him now. She was sure of herself. She had her emotions well in hand. And, despite the delicious warmth that swept through her being, she chose to reveal no sign of it to him.

"I do understand," she said quietly, meeting his gaze with a directness that hurt him sorely. "And you, too, understand. I could not be your wife. I am glad, yet sorry, that you love me, and I am proud to have heard you say that you want me. But I am a sensible creature, Mr. Chase, and, being sensible, am therefore selfish. I have seen women of my unhappy station venture outside of their narrow confines in the search for lifelong joy with men who might have been kings—men of the great wide world instead of the soulless, heartless patch which such as I call a realm. Not one in a hundred of those women found the happiness they were so sure of grasping just outside their prison walls. It was not in the blood. We must marry and live and die in the sphere to which we were born. We must go through life unloved and uncherished, bringing princes into the world, seeing happiness and love just beyond our

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"I love you." We are bound by chains no force can break—the chains of prejudice.

She had withdrawn her hands from his. He was standing before her as calm and unmoved as a statue.

"Just the same," he went on gently, "you love me as I love you. You kissed me. I could feel love in you then. I can see it in you now. You will marry Prince Karl in June, and all the rest of your life will be bleak December. You will never forget this month of March—our month." He paused for a moment to look deeply into her incredulous eyes. His face writhed in sudden pain. Then he burst forth with a vehemence that startled her. "My God, I pity you with all my soul! All your life!"

"Don't pity me!" she cried fiercely. "I cannot endure this."

"Forgive me! I shouldn't say such things to you. It's as if I were bullying you."

"You must not think of me as unhappy—ever. Go on your own way, Hollingsworth Chase, and forget that you have known me. You will find happiness with some one else. You have loved before; you can and will love again. I—I have never loved before, but perhaps, like you, I shall love again. You will love again?" she demanded, her lip trembling with an irresolution she could not control.

"Yes," he said calmly; "I'll love the wife of Karl Brabetz."

She started violently. Her cheek went red and white and her eyes widened as her thoughts went back to the naive prophecy in the treasure chamber.

She followed him slowly to the terrace. He stopped in the doorway and leisurely drew forth his cigarette case.

"Shall we wait for the explosion?" he asked without a sign of the emotion that had gone before. She gravely selected a cigarette from the case which he extended. As he lighted his own he watched her draw from her little gold bag a diamond studded case half filled. Without a word of apology she calmly deposited the cigarette in the case and restored it to the bottom of the bag.

"Then she looked up brightly. 'I am not smoking, you see,' she said, with a smile. 'I am saving all of these for you when the famine comes.'"

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, something like incredulity in the smile that transfigured his face.

"I could be a thrifty housewife, couldn't I?" she asked naively. At that moment a dull, heavy report as of distant thunder came to their ears. The windows rattled sharply, and the earth beneath them seemed to quiver. Involuntarily she drew nearer to him.

"You could if you had half a chance," he said dryly and then casually remarked the explosion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DISQUIETING END OF FOW.

LATER on he and Deppingham visited the underground chamber, accompanied by Mr. Britz. They found that the door to the passage had been blown away by the terrific concussion. The subterranean passage at this place was completely filled with earth and stone.

Deppingham stared at the closed mouth of the passage. "They've cut off our exit, but they've also secured us from invasion from this source. I wonder if the beggars were clever enough to carry the plunder above the food line. If not they've had their

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