

POOR CO

Continued

pen" roared the judge frantically. "You should be prepared for the best or the worst. Don't look like a sick dog. You go to the island at once. Take your wife along if you like. You'll find her ladyship there, and she'll need a woman to tell her troubles to. I don't think we'll have any trouble getting the British heirs to join in the suit to overthrow the will. The only point is this—the islanders must not have the advantage that your absence from Japat will give to them. Now, I'll"—

"But I don't like the suggestion that my wife will be obliged to die in order"—

"Please leave all the details to me, Mr. Browne. It may not be necessary for her to die. There are other alternatives in law. Give the lawyers a chance. All you have to do is to plant yourself on that island and stay there until we tell you to get off."

"Or the islanders push me off," indignantly.

Young Mr. Browne went away at dusk, half reeling under the responsibility of existence, and eventually reached the side of the anxious young woman uptown. He laid the facts and awaited the wall of dismay.

"I think it will be perfectly jolly!" she cried instead and kissed him rapturously.

Over the opposite side of the Atlantic the excitement in certain circles was even more intense than that produced in Boston. Lord Deppingham needed the money, but he was a whole day in grasping the fact that his wife could not have it and him at the same time. The beautiful and fashionable Lady Deppingham, once little Agnes Ruthven, came as near to having hysterics as Englishwomen ever do, but she called in a famous doctor of a doctor. For three days she neglected her social duties and they were many, ignored her gallant admirers (and they were many) and hurried back and forth between home and chambers so vigorously that his lordship was seldom closer than a day behind in anything she did.

There was a great piling of trunks, a jangling of keys, a thousand good-bys, a castoff season, and the Deppinghams were racing away for the island of Japat, somewhere in the far south seas.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCING HOLLINGSWORTH CHASE. The excitement attending the Skaggs-Wyckoff negotiations had not yet spread to the grand duchy of Rapp-Thorberg, apparently lost as it was in the cluster of small units which went to make up a certain empire, one of the world powers. The Grand Duke Michael disdained the world at large. He had but little in common with anything that moved beyond the confines of his narrow domain. His court was sleepy, lackadaisical, unemotional, impregnable to the taunts of progression. His people were thrifty, stolid and absolutely stationary in their loyalty to the ancient traditions of the duchy. His army was a mere matter of taxation and not a thing of pomp or necessity.

The precise location of the grand duchy in the map of the world has little or nothing to do with this narrative. Indeed, were it not for the fact that the grand duke possessed a charming and most desirable daughter the Thorberg dynasty would not be mentioned at all. The grand duke's peace of mind had been severely disturbed—so severely, in fact, that he was transferring his troubles to the emperor, who, in turn, felt obliged to communicate with the United States ambassador, who, in his turn, had no other alternative than to take summary action in respect to the indiscretions of a fellow countryman. Chase's conscience was even and serene, and he was resigning his post with the confidence that he had performed his obligations as an American gentleman should, even though the performance had created an extraordinary commotion. Chase was new to the old world and its customs, especially those rigorous ones which surrounded royalty and denied it the right to venture into the commonplace.

Chase had been the representative of the American government at Thorberg for six months. The American flag floated above his doorway in the Friedrichstrasse, but in all his six months of occupation not ten Americans had crossed the threshold. He was a vigorous, healthy young man, and it may well be presumed that the situation bored him. He was not a politician; no more was he an office seeker. He was a real soldier of fortune in search of affairs—in peace or in war, on land or at sea. Possessed of a small income sufficient to sustain his life if he managed to advance it to the purple age, but wholly incapable of supporting him as a thrifless diplomat, he was compelled to make the best of his talents, no matter to what test they were put. He left college at twenty-two, possessed of the praiseworthy design to earn his own way without recourse to the \$4,500 income from a certain trust fund. His plan also incorporated the hope to save every penny of that income for the possible "rainy day." He was now thirty. In each of several New York banks he had something like \$4,000 drawn to his interest, while no penny of his own way through the world's war, more or less, as a rule.

Chase was wont to spend his philosophy, "I'll have a hundred thousand that I can be ninety just what I'll have. Moreover, I may have a hundred thousand a year and have to maintain a poor old relative, which is a terrible strain, you know. You may have the \$4,000 a year, if you don't do anything."

He did not refer to the chance that he was quite sure to come in for a large legacy at the death of his maternal grandfather, a millionaire ranch owner in the far west.

After leaving college he drifted pretty much over the world, taking pot luck with fortune and clasping the hand of circumstance. There had been hard roads to travel as well as easy ones, but he never complained. He swung on through life with the heart of a soldier and the confidence of a pagan. He loathed business, and he abhorred trade.

He was an orphan and bounden to no man. No one had the right to question his actions after his twenty-first anniversary. He went in for law at Yale and then practiced restlessly, vaguely, for two years in Baltimore under the patronage of his father's oldest friend, a lawyer of distinction.

Tiring of the law books and reports in the old judge's office, he suddenly abandoned his calling and set forth to see the world. Almost before his friends knew that he had left he was heard of in Turkestan. In course of time he served as a war correspondent for one of the great newspapers, acted as volunteer for great numbers in the Philippines, carried a rifle with the Boers in South Africa, hunted wild beasts in Asia and in Hottentot land, took snapshots in St. Petersburg and almost got to the north pole with one of the expeditions. Not in a month's journey would you meet a truer thoroughbred, a more agreeable chap, a more polished vagabond, than Hollingsworth Chase, first lieutenant in Dame Fortune's army. Tall, good looking, rawboned, cheerful, gallant, he was the true comrade of those merry, reckless volunteers from all lands who find commissions in Fortune's army and serve her faithfully.

He was nearly thirty when the diplomatic service began to appeal to him as a pleasing variation from the rigorous occupations he had followed heretofore. One of his uncles was a congressman and another was in some way connected with railroads. He first sought the influence of the latter and then the recommendation of the former. In less than six weeks after his arrival in Washington he was off for the city of Thorberg, in the grand duchy of Rapp-Thorberg, carrying with him an appointment as consul and supplied with the proper stamps and seal of office.

At the end of five months he loathed Thorberg; he hated the inhabitants; he smarted under the sting of royal decrees he had no right to issue, no boon companions, and he was obliged to be good! What wonder, then, that the bored, suffering, vivacious Mr. Chase seized the first opportunity to leap headforemost into the very thick of a most appalling indiscretion!

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