

COPY

THE MAN FROM BRODNEY

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charged from one to the other, striking fire to the blood. He was forgetting Neenah, forgetting himself, thinking only of the opportunity and its fascination. In another instant he would have drawn her hand to his lips. Neenah came to a standstill and uttered a warning whisper. Chase recovered himself with a mighty start, a chill as of one avoiding an unseen peril sweeping over him. Geneva heard the sharp, painful intake of his breath and felt the sudden relaxation of his fingers. She was not puzzled. She, too, had felt the magic of the touch, and her blood was surging red. She knew then that she had been clasping his hand with a fervor that was as unmistakable as it was shameless.

Neenah may have felt the magnetic current that coursed through these surcharged creatures. She was smiling mysteriously to herself. "Wait here," she whispered to Chase, ever so softly. She released his hand and moved off in the blackness of the passage. "I will bring Selim," came back to them.

"Oh!" fell faintly, tremulously, from Geneva's lips. It was a trap, after all! But it was not the trap laid by a traitor. She fell all aquiver. Her heart fluttered violently; her breath came quickly. Alone with him, and their blood leaping to the touch that thrilled!

Chase could no more have restrained the hand that went out suddenly in quest of hers than he could have checked his own heart throbs. A wave of exquisite joy swept over him—the joy of a temptation that knew no fear, no conscience. He found her cold little hand and clasped it in tense fingers—fingers that throbed with the call to passion. He drew her close; their bodies touched and sweetly trembled.

"Are you afraid?" he whispered in tones he had never heard before. "Yes," she murmured convulsively—"of you! Please, please don't!" At the same time she tightened her grasp upon his hand and crept closer to him, governed by an unconquerable craving. Chase had the sensation of smothering. He could not believe the senses which told him that she was responding to his appeal.

"Geneva!" he murmured, almost gasped, in his delirium. His arms went about her slender figure suddenly, and she was strained to his breast, locked to him with hands that seemed unbreakable. Her face was lifted to his. The blackness of the passage was impenetrable, but love was the guide. He found her lips in one wild, glorious kiss.

A door creaked sharply. He released her. Their quivering arms fell away. They drew ever so slightly apart, still under the control of the influence which had held them for that brief moment. She was trembling violently. A soft, wailing sigh as of pain came from her lips.

Then the glimmer of a light came to them through the half open door at the end of the passage. They gazed at it without comprehension, dumb in their sudden weakness. A shadowy figure came out through the door, and Selim's voice, low and tense, called to them.

"Forgive me," he murmured. "It is too late," she replied. Then his hand sought hers again, and, dizzy with emotion, he led her up to the open door. As they passed into the huge, dimly lighted chamber he turned to look into her face. She met his gaze, and there were tears in her eyes. Selim was ahead of them. She shook her head sadly, and he understood. "Can we ever forget?" she murmured plaintively.

"Never!" he whispered. "Then we shall always regret—always regret!" she said, withdrawing her hand. "It was the beginning and the end."

"Not the end, dearest one—if we are always to regret," he interposed eagerly. "But why the end? You do love me! I know it! And I worship you—oh, you don't know how I worship you, Geneva!"

"Flush! We were fools! Don't, please! I do not love you. I was carried away by— Oh, can't you understand? Remember what I am! You know and yet you have degraded me in my own eyes. Is my own self respect nothing? You will laugh and you may boast after I am married to—"

"Geneva!" he protested as if in great pain. "Excellency," came from the lips of Selim at the lower end of the chamber, breaking in sharply upon their little world, "there is no time to be lost. Time to be lost! And he had held her in his arms! Time to be lost! All the rest of time was to be lost! They may return at any moment!"

Chase pulled himself together. He looked into her eyes for a moment, finding nothing there but a command to go. She stood straight and unyielding on the very spot which had seen her trembling with emotion but a moment before. "Come, Selim," he said, and moved away from her side as Neenah came toward them from the opposite wall. Geneva did not move. She stood quite still and numb, watching his tall figure crossing the stone floor. Ah, what a man he was! The little Persian wife of Selim, after waiting for a full minute, gently touched the arm of the princess. Geneva started and looked down into the dark, accusing, smiling

eyes. She flushed deeply and hated herself.

"Shall we go back?" she asked nervously. "I—I have seen enough. Come, Neenah. Lead me back to—"

"Most glorious excellency," said Neenah, shaking her pretty head, "we are to wait here. The sahib and Selim will join us soon."

"Where are they going?" demanded the princess, a feeling of awe coming over her. "I don't want to be left here alone." Chase and Selim had opened a low, heavy iron door at the lower end and were peering into the darkness beyond.

"Selim will explain. He has learned much. It is the secret passage to the coast. Be not afraid."

Geneva looked about her for the first time. They were standing in a long, low room, the walls of which reeked with dampness and gave out a noxious odor. A single electric light provided a faint, almost unnatural light. Selim raised a lighted lantern as he led Chase through the squat door. Behind Geneva were enormous casks, a dozen or more, reaching almost to the ceiling. A number of boxes stood close by, while on the opposite side of the chamber four small iron chests were to be seen, dragged out from recesses in the distant corner. Observing her look of wonder, Neenah vouchsafed a casual explanation.

"It is the wine cellar and the store-room. The iron chests contain silver and gold plate that came from the great rajah of Marpat in exchange for the five huge rubies which now adorn his crown. The old sahibs stored the chests here many years ago, but few know of their existence. See! They were hidden in the walls over there. Von Blitz has found them."

"Von Blitz?" in amazement. "He has been here. He has carried away many chests. There were twenty in all."

"And—and he will return for these?" queried the princess in alarm.

"Assuredly, most glorious one. Soon, perhaps. But be not afraid. Selim can close the passage door. He cannot get in. He will be fooled, oh! Why should you be afraid? Have you not with you the most wonderful, the most brave sahib? Would he not give his life for you?" The dark eyes sparkled with understanding—aye, even mischief. Geneva felt that this oriental witch knew everything. For a long time she looked in uncertain mood upon that smiling, wistful face. Then she said softly, moved by an irresistible impulse to confess something, even obscurely.

"Oh, if only I were such as you, Neenah, and could live forever on this dear island!"

"But, most high, there are no princes here. There is no one to whom the most gracious one could be sold. No one who could pay more than a dozen rubies. Women are cheap here, and you would be a woman, not a most beautiful princess."

"I would not care to be a princess, perhaps."

"You love my Sahib Chase?" demanded Neenah abruptly, eagerly.

"Neenah!" gasped Geneva, with a startled look. Neenah looked intently into the unsteady, blue gray eyes and then bent over to kiss the hand of the princess. The latter laughed almost aloud, in her confusion. She caught herself up quickly and said with some asperity: "You foolish child, I am to become a prince's wife. How can I love your sahib? What nonsense! I am to marry a prince, and he is not to pay for me in rubies."

"Ah, how wonderful!" cried Neenah, with ravishing candor. "A prince for a husband and the glorious Sahib

or more than one girl—a dame in Europe—aye, of women at her own court. Even a princess she had known who—but for shame! she cried in her heart. It could not be. Despite herself a cruel, distressing shyness came over her as he approached, his eyes glowing with the light she found, just craved. Was this man to remain in her life? Was he? Would he come to her and wage the unfair war? Was he honest? Was he even now coveting her as other men had coveted the women she knew and despised? She found herself confronted by the shocking conviction that she knew she could never be his wife. He knew she was to wed another, and yet—it was unbelievable.

She met his eager advance with a quick, shrill laugh of defiance and noted the surprise in his eyes. Dim as the light was, she could have sworn that the look in those eyes was honest. Ah, the little Neenah! The reaction was as sudden as the revolt had been. Her smile grew warm and shy. "Von Blitz has been here," he was saying half diffidently, still searching deep in her eyes. "He's played hob. And he's likely to return at any minute."

"Then let us go quickly. I have no desire to meet the objectionable Mr. Von Blitz. Isn't it dreadfully dangerous here, Mr. Chase?"

"Mr. Chase?" he said, with his winning smile. "Now?"

"Yes, now and always Mr. Chase," she said steadily. "You know that it cannot be otherwise. I can't always be a fool."

His face turned a deep red; his lips parted for a moment in this reluctant estimate, but he controlled himself. "Yes, it is dangerous here," he said quietly, answering her question. "As soon as Selim bars that door upon the inside we'll go. I was a fool to bring you here."

"How could you know what the dangers would be?" she asked.

"I'll confess I didn't expect Von Blitz," he said dryly.

"But you did expect"—she began, with a start, biting her lips.

"There's a vast difference between expectation and hope, princess." Neenah had joined Selim at the door when the men re-entered the chamber. Now she was approaching with her husband.

"May Allah bless you and profit for himself, excellencies," said the good Selim. Neenah plainly had advanced her suspicions to the brass body servant. Geneva blushed, and then her eyes blazed. She gave the girl a scornful look. Neenah smiled happily, unreservedly, in return.

"Allah help us, you should say, if Von Blitz returns," interposed Chase hastily. "Is the door barred?"

"No, excellency. The bars have sprung. I cannot drop them in place. As you know, the lock has been blown away. The charge sprung the bolts. We must go at once."

"Then there is no way to keep them out of the chateau?" cried Geneva anxiously.

"They can go no farther than this room," explained Selim. "We lock the double iron doors from the other side—the door through which you came, most glorious excellency—and they cannot enter the cellars above. This is the chamber which opens into the underground passage to the coast. The passage was made for escape from the chateau in case of trouble and was known to but few. My father was the servant of Sahib Wyckholme, and I used to live in the chateau."

"Once there was a boat, a launch, which lay hidden below the cliffs on the north coast. The passage led to this boat. It was always ready to put out to sea. But one night it was destroyed by the great rocks which fell from the cliffs in an earthquake. When I came here I at once thought of the passage. You will see that the doors into the cellar cannot be opened from this chamber. The locks and bolts are on the other side. I knew where the keys were hidden. It was easy to unlock the doors and come into this room. I found that some one had been here before me. The door to the passage had been forced open from without, cracked by dynamite. Many of the treasure boxes have been removed. Von Blitz was here not an hour ago. He wears boots. I saw the footprints among the naked ones in the passage. They will come back for the other chests. Then they will blow up the passageway with powder, and escape from the chateau through it will be cut off. I have found the kegs of powder in the passage and have destroyed the fuses. It will be of no avail, sahib. They will blow it up at the other end, which will be just the same."

"There's no time to be lost," cried Chase. "We must bring enough men down here to capture them when they return—shoot 'em if necessary. Come on! We can surprise them if we hurry."

They were starting across the chamber toward the door when a gruff, sepulchral oath came rolling up to the chamber through the secret passage. Quick as a flash Selim, who realized that they could not reach and open the door leading to the stairs, turned among the huge wine casks, first blinding his lantern. He whispered for the others to follow. In a moment they were squeezing themselves through the narrow spaces between the dark, strong smelling casks, back into a darkness so opaque that it seemed lifeless.

"They won't suspect that we are here," whispered Selim as the door to the passage creaked. "Keep quiet! Don't breathe!"

The single electric light was still burning as Selim had found it when he first came. The door swung open slowly, heavily, and Jacob von Blitz, mud covered, reeking with perspiration and panting savagely, stepped

into the chamber. He was alone. He looked about him in amazement. The door was closed. He tried to open it, but it was locked. He looked at his watch. It was ten minutes past midnight. He had been waiting for the others to come. He had been waiting for the others to come. He had been waiting for the others to come.

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Jacob von Blitz stepped into the light.

Chase for a lover all your life! Ah! The exclamations was no less than a sigh of rapturous indorsement.

The princess stared at her first in consternation, then in dismay. Before she could find words to combat this alarming prophecy, so ingeniously presented to her reflections, Selim and Hollingsworth Chase returned to the chamber. She was distressed, even confounded, to find that she was staring at Chase with a strange, abashed curiosity growing in her eyes—a stare that she suddenly was afraid he might observe and appreciate. A wave of revulsion, of shame, spread over her whole being.

With the swiftness of lightning she recalled the things that had been said