

THE MA FROM DUNDEE

Continued from page 2

work for nothing."

"Sellm says there is a cave near the mouth of the passage," said Chase. "The tunnel comes out halfway up the side of the mountain overlooking the sea, and the hole is very carefully screened by the thick shrubbery. Trust Von Blitz to do the safe thing."

"I don't mind Von Blitz escaping so much, Chase," said his lordship earnestly, "as I do the unfortunate closing of what may have been our way to leave the chateau in the end."

"You must think me an ungrateful fool," said Chase bitterly. He had already stated his position clearly.

"Not at all, old chap. Don't get that into your head. I only meant that a hole in the ground is worth two warships that won't come when we need 'em."

Chase looked up quickly. "You don't believe that I can get the crusers?"

"Oh, come now, Chase; I'm not a damned native, you know."

"The other grined amiably. "Well, you just wait, as the boy says."

After satisfying themselves that there was no possibility of the enemy ever being able to enter the chateau through the collapsed passage the trio returned to the upper world.

Robert Browne and Lady Agnes were seated on the edge of the fountain in Apollo's grotto, conversing earnestly, even eagerly, with Mr. Bowles, who stood before them in an unmistakable attitude of indecision and perturbation. Deppingham gave Chase a look which plainly revealed his uneasiness.

"You don't mean to say, Lord Deppingham, that you're afraid the heirs will follow the advice of that rattle-headed Saunders," said Chase, with a laugh. "Why, it wouldn't hold in court for a second. Ask Britt."

Britt cleared his throat. "Not for half a second," he said. "I'm only wondering if Bowles has authority to grant divorces."

"I dare say he has," said Deppingham, tugging at his mustache. "He's—he's a magistrate."

"It doesn't follow," said Chase, "that he has unlimited legal powers."

"But what are they ragging him about down here, Chase?" blurted out the unhappy Deppingham.

"Come in and have a drink," said Chase suddenly. Deppingham was shivering. "You've got a chill in that damp cellar. I can assure you positively as representative of the opposition that the grandchildren of Skaggs and Wyckholme are not going to divorce or marry anybody while I'm here, Britt and Saunders and Bowles to the contrary. And Lady Deppingham is no fool. Come on and have something to warm the cockles."

"All right, old chap," Deppingham said, with a laugh. "I am chilled to the bone. I'll join you in a few minutes." To their surprise, he started off across the terrace in the direction of the consulting trio.

"Just the same, Chase," said Britt after a long silence, "he's worried, and not about marriage or divorce either. He's jealous. I didn't believe it was in him."

"See here, Britt; you've no right to stir him up with those confounded remarks about divorce. You know that it's rot. Don't do it."

"My dear Chase," said Britt, waving his hand serenely, "I can't help laughing at the position you're in at present. It doesn't matter what you get on to in connection with our side of the case, you're where you can't take advantage of it without getting killed

by your own clients. Horrible paradox, eh?"

When Deppingham rejoined them he was pale and very nervous. His wife, who had been weeping, came up with him, while Browne went off toward the stables with the ex-banker.

"What do you think has happened?" demanded his lordship, addressing the two men, who stood by irresolutely. "Somebody's trying to poison us! Lady Deppingham's dog is dead—poisoned, gentlemen!" He was wiping the moisture from his brow.

"I'm sorry, Lady Deppingham," said Chase earnestly. "He was a nice dog. But I hardly think he could have eaten what was intended for any of us. If he was poisoned, the poison was meant for him and for no one else. He bit one of the stable boys yesterday."

"That may all be very true, Chase," protested his lordship, "but don't you see it goes to show that some one has a stock of poison on hand, and we may be the next to get it. He died half an hour after eating—after eating a biscuit that was intended for me! It's—it's damned uncomfortable, to say the least."

"I'm sure you need the brandy after all this. Come along. Will you join us, Lady Deppingham?" said Chase.

"No. I'm going to bed!" She started away, then stopped and looked at her husband, her eyes wide with sudden comprehension. "Oh, Deppy, I should have died! I should have died!"

"My dear!"

"I couldn't have lived if"—

"But, my dear, I didn't eat it—and here we are. God bless you!" He turned abruptly and walked off beside her, ignoring the two distressed Americans. As they passed through the French window Deppingham put his arm about his wife's waist. Chase turned to Britt.

"I don't know what you're thinking, Britt, but it isn't so, whatever it is."

"Good Lord, man, I wasn't thinking that!"

There was not the slightest doubt in the minds of those conversant with the situation that the poison had been intended for either Lord or Lady Deppingham. The drug had been subtly, skillfully placed in one of the sandwiches which came up to their rooms at 11 o'clock, the hour at which they invariably drank off a cup of bouillon.

Drusilla Browne was jesting, no doubt, but it is doubtful if any one grasped the delicacy of her humor when she observed, in mock concern, addressing the assembled mourners, that she believed the heirs were trying to get rid of their incumbences after the good old Borgin fashion and that she would never again have the courage to eat a mouthful of food so long as she stood between her husband and a hymeneal fortune.

"You know, my dear," she concluded, turning to her husband, "that I might have had Lord Deppingham's biscuit. His wife asked me to take it. Goodness, you're a dreadful Borgin person, Agnes," she went on, smiling brightly at her ladyship. Deppingham was fumbling nervously at his monocle. "I should think you would be nervous, Lord Deppingham."

The most rigid questioning elicited no information from the servants. Britt's sudden, involuntary look of suspicion, directed toward Lady Agnes and Robert Browne, did not escape the keen eye of Hollingsworth Chase.

"Impossible!" he said, half aloud. He looked up and saw that the princess was staring at him questioning. He shook his head without thinking.

Despair settled upon the white people. They were confronted by a new and serious peril—poison. At no time could they feel safe.

One of the stable boys volunteered to carry a note from Chase to Rasula, asking the opportunity to lay a question of grave importance before him. Chase suggested to Rasula that he should meet him that evening at the west gate, under a flag of truce. The tone of the letter was more or less peremptory.

Rasula came, sullen but curious. At first he would not believe, but Chase was firm in his denunciation of Jacob von Blitz. Then he was pleased to accuse Chase of duplicity and double dealing, going so far as to charge the deposed American with plotting against Von Blitz to further his own ends in more ways than one. At last, however, he agreed to follow the advice of the American—grudgingly, to be sure, but none the less determined.

"You will find everything as I have stated it, Rasula," said Chase. "I'm sorry you are against me, for I would be your friend. I've told you how to reach the secret cave. The chests are there. The passage is closed. You can trap him in the attempt to rob the bank. I could have taken him red handed and given him over to Lord Deppingham, but you would never have known the truth. Now I ask you to judge for yourselves. Give him a fair trial, Rasula—as you would any man accused of crime—and be just. If you need a witness—an eyewitness—call on me. I will come, and I will appear against him. I've been honest with you. I am willing to trust you to be honest with me."

CHAPTER XXIV.  
DEPPINGHAM FALLS ILL.

THAT evening Lord Deppingham took to his bed with violent chills. He shivered and burned by turns and spent a most distressing night. Bobby Browne came in twice to see him before retiring. For some reason unknown to any one but himself, Deppingham refused to be treated by the young man, notwithstanding the fact that Browne laid claim to a physician's certificate and professed to be especially successful in breaking up "the ague." Lady Agnes entreated her hedge lord to submit to the doses, but Deppingham was resolute to treat himself.

"A Dover's powder, Deppy, or a few grains of quinine. Please be sensible. You're just like a child."

"What's in a Dover's powder?" demanded the patient, who had never been ill in his life.

"Peppercorn, opium, sugar of milk or sulphate of potash. It's an anodyne, diaphoretic," said Browne.

"Opium, eh?" came sharply from the couch. "Good Lord, an overdose of it would— He checked the words abruptly and gave vent to a nervous fit of laughter.

"Don't be a fool, George," commanded his wife. "No one is trying to poison you."

"Who's saying that he's going to poison me?" demanded Deppingham shortly. "I'm objecting because I don't like the idea of taking medicine from a man just out of college."

"I've had my wife a powder, old man. She's got a nervous headache," urged Browne tolerantly.

"Your wife?" exclaimed Deppingham, sitting up. "The devil!" He looked hard at Browne for a moment. "Oh, I say, now, old chap, don't you think it's rather too much of a coincidence?"

Browne arose quickly, a flash of resentment in his eyes. "See here, Deppingham!"

"I apologize, Browne," said Deppingham hastily. "I'm not afraid of your medicine. I'm only thinking of my wife. If I should happen to die, don't you know, there would be people who might say that you could have cured me. See what I mean?"

"You dear old goose!" cried his wife. "I fancy Selim or Ballo or even Bowles knows what a fellow does himself with when he's bowled over by one of these beastly island ailments. Oblige me, Agnes, and send for Bowles."

He immediately recommended an old-fashioned Dover's powder and ventured the opinion that a "good sweat" would soon put his lordship on his feet, "better than ever." Deppingham kept Bowles beside him while Browne generously prepared and administered the medicine.

Later in the night the princess came to see how the patient was getting on. He was in a dripping perspiration.

Genevra drew a chair up beside his couch and sat down. Lady Agnes was yawning sleepily over a book.

"Do you know, I believe I'd feel better if I could have another chill," he said. "I'm so beastly hot now that I can't stand it. Aggy, why don't you turn out on the balcony for a bit of fresh air? I'm a brute to have kept you moping in here all evening."

Lady Agnes sighed prettily and stepped out into the murky night.

"I say, Genevra, what's the news?" demanded his lordship. "Where is Chase?"

Now, the princess, it is most distressing to state, had willfully avoided Mr. Chase since early that morning.

"I'm sure I don't know. I had dinner with Mrs. Browne in her room. I haven't seen him."

"Nice chap," remarked Deppingham. "Isn't that the now speaking to Agnes out there?"

Genevra looked up quickly. A man's voice came in to them from the balcony, following Lady Deppingham's soft laugh.

"No," she said, settling back calmly. "It's Mr. Browne."

"Oh," said Deppingham, a slight shadow coming into his eyes. "Nice chap, too," he added a moment later.

"I don't like him," said she, lowering her voice.

"I've no doubt Agnes is as much to blame as he," said his lordship at last.

"If by don't you marry him?"

"She's made a fool of more than one man, my dear. She rather likes it."

"He's behaving like a brute. They've been married less than a year."

"It really doesn't amount to anything, Genevra," he argued. "It will blow over in a fortnight. Aggy's always doing this sort of thing, you know."

"I know, Deppy," she said sharply. "But this man is different. He's not a gentleman. Mr. Skaggs wasn't a gentleman. Blood tells. He'll boast of this flirtation until the end of his days."

"Aggy's had dozens of men in love with her—really in love," he protested feebly. "She's not!"

"They've come and gone, and she's still the same old Agnes, and you're the same old Deppy. I'm not thinking of you or Aggy. It's Drusilla Browne."

"I see. Thanks for the confidence you have in Aggy. I dare say I know

how Drusilla feels. I've—I've had a bad turn or two myself lately, and— but never mind. By the way, what does Chase say about it?" he asked suddenly.

She started and caught her breath. "Mr. Chase? He—he hasn't said anything about it," she responded lamely. "He's—he's not that sort."

"Ah," reflected Deppingham, "he is a gentleman?"

Genevra flushed. "Yes, I'm sure he is."

"I say, Genevra," he said, looking straight into her rebellious eyes, "you're in love with Chase. Why don't you marry him?"

"You—you are really delicious, Deppy," she cried. "The fever has—"

"He's good enough for any one—even you," went on his lordship coolly. "He may have a wife," said she, collecting her wits with rare swiftness. "Who knows? Don't be silly, Deppy."

"Rubbish! Haven't you stuffed Aggy and me full of the things you found out concerning him before he left Thorberg, and afterward—the letters from the ambassador's wife and the glowing things your St. Petersburg friends have to say of him, eh? Besides, he'd give his head to marry you—having already lost it."

"You are very amusing, Deppy, when you try to be clever. Is there a clause in that silly old will compelling me to marry any one?"

"Of course not, my dear princess, but I fancy you've got a will of your own. Where there's a will there's a way. You'd marry him tomorrow if—"

"If I were not amply prepared to contest my own will?" she supplied airily.

"No; if your will was not wrapped in convention three centuries old. You won't marry Chase because you are a princess. I'm awfully sorry for you, Genevra."

"Sorry for me? Dear me!"

"You're tremendously gone on him."

"Nonsense! Why, I couldn't marry Mr. Chase," she exclaimed, irritable at last. "But I put such things into my head—I mean don't get such things into that ridiculous old head of yours. Are you forgetting that I am to become Karl's wife-in-June? You are babbling, Deppy."

"Well, let's say no more about it," he said, lying back resignedly. "It's too bad, that's all. Chase is a man. Karl isn't. You loathe him. I don't wonder that you turn pale and look frightened. Take my advice—take Chase."

"Don't!" she cried, a break in her voice. She arose and went swiftly toward the window. Then she stopped and turned upon him, her lips parted as if to give utterance to the thing that was stirring her heart so violently. The words would not come. She smiled, however, and said instead: "Good night! Get a good sleep."

"The same to you," he called feverishly.

"Deppy," she said firmly, a red spot in each cheek, her voice tense and strained to a high pitch of suppressed decision, "I shall marry Karl Brabatz. That will be the end of your Mr. Chase."

"I hope so," he said. "But I'm not so sure of it if you continue to love him as you do now."

She went out with her cheeks burning and a frightened stir in her heart. Her thoughts raced back to Neenah's airy prophecy.

How could she face the charge, "I'm not so sure of it," unless she killed the indictment, "If you love him as you do now?"

Lady Agnes and Browne passed by without seeing her and entered the window. She heard him say something to his companion, softly, tenderly—she knew not what it was. And Lady Agnes laughed—yes, nervously. Ah, but Agnes was playing! She was not in love with this man. It was different. It was not what Neenah meant—nor Deppingham, honest friend that he was.

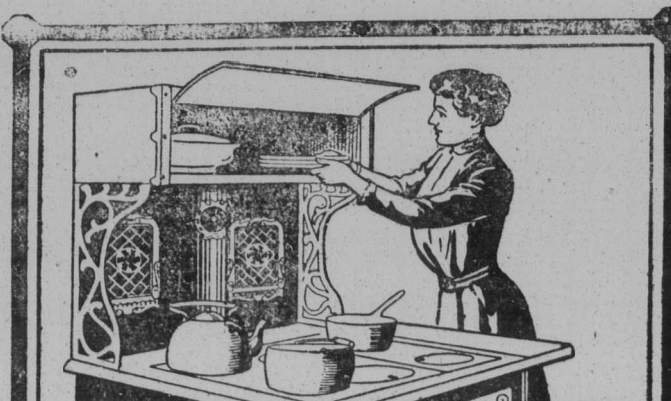
Down below she heard voices. She wondered—inconsistently alert—whether he was one of the speakers. Thomas Saunders and Miss Pelham were coming in from the terrace. They were in love with each other! They could be in love with each other. There was no law, no convention that said them nay! They could marry—and still love! "If you continue to love him as you do now" battered at the doors of her conscience.

Her maid came in, and she prepared for bed. Left alone, she perched herself in the window seat to cool her heated face with the breezes that were coming up from the sea. Her heart was hot; no breeze could cool it; nothing but the ice of decision could drive out the fever that possessed it.

"It is impossible—incredible!" she was saying to herself. "I could not love him like that. I should hate him. God above, me, am I not different from those women whom I have known and pitied and despised? Am I not different from Guelma von Herick? Am I not different from Prince Henri's wife? Ah, and they loved too! And is he not different from those other, glancing, ugly men who came into the lives of those women? Ah, yes, yes! He is different."

She sat and stared out over the black sea, lighted fitfully by the distant lightning. There she pronounced sentence upon him—and herself. There was no place for him in her world. He should feel her disdain; he should suffer for his presumption. Presumption? In what way had he offended? She put her hands to her eyes, but her lips smiled—smiled with the memory of the kiss she had returned.

"What a fool! What a fool I am," she cried aloud, springing up resolutely. "I must forget. I told him I couldn't, but I can—I can." Halfway across the room she stopped, her hands



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