

THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S

(Continued)

The three men... "Good Lord," exclaimed Chase, who could face any peril and relish the experience if needs be, but who now foresaw a sickening privation. "You can't mean it, said he."

CHAPTER XX.

THEY were not long in finding out what had happened to Saunders. After luncheon, while Browne and the three ladies were completing the preparations for the entertainment, Miss Pelham appeared before Deppingham and Chase in the former's headquarters.

"I'm afraid it won't be good evidence," volunteered her lawyer. "It will have to be substantiated, my dear."

"Please don't call me 'my dear,' Mr. Britt. Never you mind about it not being good evidence. Thomas Saunders won't enjoy hearing it read in court just the same. What I want to ask of you, Lord Deppingham, as a friend is to give Mr. Britt your deposition regarding Mr. Saunders' attitude toward me to the best of your knowledge and belief. I'll take it verbatim and put it into typewriting free of charge. I—I don't see anything to laugh at, Mr. Chase," she cried, flushing painfully.

"My dear girl," he said, controlling himself, "I think you are misjudging the magnitude of a lover's quarrel. Don't you think it is rather a poor time to talk breach of promise with the guns of an enemy ready to take a pop at us at any moment?"

"It's no worse than a charity ball, Mr. Chase," she said severely. "Charity begins at home, gentlemen, and I'm here to look out for myself. No one else will, let me tell you that. I want to get the deposition of every person in the chateau. They can be sworn to before Mr. Bowles, who is a magistrate, I'm told. He can marry me and—"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Deppingham suddenly. "Can he? Upon my soul!" "His manner changed as soon as that horrid little wife of Selim came to the chateau. I don't like the way she makes eyes at him, and I told him so this morning down in the store-rooms. My, but he flew up! He said he'd be— if he'd marry me." She began to use her handkerchief vigorously. The men smiled as they looked away.

"I—I intend to sue him for breach of promise," she said thickly. "Is it as bad as all that?" asked Deppingham consolingly. "What do you mean by 'bad as all that'?" He kissed her time and again, but that's all. "I'll send for Saunders," said Deppingham sternly. "Not while I'm here," she exclaimed. "Just as you like, Miss Pelham. I'll send for you after we've talked it over with Saunders. We can't afford a scandal in the chateau, don't you know."

say in my presence. Saunders distinctly, "you are a blooming traitor. You told me yourself that she was used to all that sort of thing and wouldn't mind. Now see what you do! It's—it's outrageous." He was half in tears. Then, turning to Deppingham, he went on fiercely: "I won't be bullied by any woman, sir. We got along beautifully until she began to shy figurative pots at me because Selim's wife looked at me occasionally. Hang it all, sir, I can't help it if the ladies choose to look at me. Minnie—Miss Pelham—was perfectly silly about it. Good Lord!" he ground in recollection. "It was a very trying scene she made, sir. More than ever it made me realize that I can't marry beneath me."

"Saunders," said Lord Deppingham sternly, "she loves you. I don't understand why or how, but she does. Just because you have obtained an exalted social position at Hammersmith Bridge is no reason you should become a snob. I dare say she stands just as well at Brooklyn bridge as you do at Hammersmith. She's a fine girl and would be an adornment to you much as Hammersmith could be proud of. If you want my candid opinion, Saunders, I think you're a silly ass!"

"Do you really, my lord?" quite humbly. "Shall I prove it to you by every man on the place? Miss Pelham is quite good enough for any one of us. I'd be proud to have her as my wife—if I lived at Hammersmith Bridge."

"You amaze me, sir!" "She's a very pretty girl," volunteered Chase glibly. "Oh, she could marry like a flash in New York," said Britt. "A dozen men I know of are crazy about her—good looking chaps too." The sarcasm escaped Saunders, who was fidgeting uncomfortably.

"Of course, you know, the breaking of the engagement—I should say the row—wasn't of my doing," he submitted, pulling at his finger joints nervously. "I'm afraid it can't be patched up either," said Britt dolefully. "She's been insulted, you see."

"Saunders, we can't have our only romance marred by a breach of promise suit," said his lordship resolutely. "There has simply got to be a wedding in the end or the whole world will hate us. So far you have been our prize young lover. You are the undisputed hero. Don't spoil everything at the last moment, Saunders. Patch it up and let's have a wedding in the last chapter. You should not forget that it was you who advocated multimarriage. Try it once for yourself, and if you like it, by Jove, we'll all come to your succeeding marriages and bless you, no matter how many wives you take unto yourself."

Saunders, very much impressed by these condolences, bowed himself out of the room, followed by Britt, of whom he implored help in the effort to bring about a reconciliation. He was sorely distressed by Britt's apparent reluctance to compromise a case without mature deliberation. The charity ball began at 10 o'clock, schedule time. Drusilla Browne, asserting herself as an American matron, insisted that the invitation list should include the newly as well as the mighty. She had her way, and as a result the bank employees, the French maids, Antoine and the two corporals of Rapp-Thorberg's Royal guard appeared on the floor in the grand march directly behind Mr. Britt, Mr. Saunders and Miss Pelham.

"One cannot discriminate at the charity ball," Drusilla stoutly maintained. "The hot polloi and the raff always get in at home, so why not here?" "I shall feel as if I were dancing with my greengrocer," lamented Lady Annes. Later on, when the dancing was at its height, she exclaimed with all the fervor of a charmed imagination: "I feel as the Duchess de What's-her-name must have felt, Bobby, when she danced all night at her own ball and then dressed for the gullotine instead of going to bed. We may all be shot in the morning."

The Indian fakers and showmen gave a performance in the courtyard at midnight. They were followed by the Bedouin tumblers and the inspired Persians, who danced with frantic abandon. There was but one unfortunate accident. Mr. Rivers, formerly of the bank, got very tight and fell down the steps leading to the courtyard, breaking his left arm.

Lord Deppingham and Chase kept their heads. They saw to it that the watch over the grounds and about the chateau was strictly maintained. The former led the grand march with the princess. She was more ravishingly beautiful than ever. Hollingsworth Chase was dazzled. Something seemed to shout coarsely, scoffing into his ear: "Now do you realize the distance that lies between? She was made for kings and princes, not for such as you!"

He waited long before presenting himself in quest of the dance he hungered for so greedily—afraid of her! She greeted him with a new, brighter light in her eyes. A quiver of delight long in restraint came into her voice. He saw and felt the welcome in her manner. The blood surged to his head. He mumbled his request. Then, for the first time, he was clasping her fingers, touching her waist, drawing her

gently toward his heart. Once as the sweet moment passed, she closed her eyes. Neither had spoken. His lips parted suddenly, and his fingers closed down upon hers. She saw the danger light in his eyes and knew the unuttered words that struggled to his lips and stopped there. She never knew why she should have involuntarily shook her head before she hovered her eyes. He knew what she meant. His heart turned cold again, and the distance widened once more to the old proportions.

He left her with Bobby Browne and went on upon the cool, starlit balcony. There he gently cursed himself for a fool, a dolt, an idiot. The shouts of laughter and the clapping of hands on the inside did not draw him from his unhappy reverie. He did not know until afterward that the official announcement of the engagement of Miss Minnie Pelham and Thomas Saunders was made by Bobby Browne and the health of the couple drunk in a series of bumpers.

Chase's bitter reflections were at last disturbed by a sound that came sharply to his attention. The noise came from directly below where he stood. He peered over the stone railing. The terrace was barely ten feet below him. A mass of bushes fringed the base of the wall, dark, thick, fragrant. The next moment a dark figure shot out from the shadows and slunk off into night, followed by another and another and yet others, seven in all.

"The truth suddenly dawned upon him. The prisoners had escaped from the dungeon!" He dashed into the ballroom and shouted the alarm. Confusion ensued. "There's been treachery," he explained quickly. "Some one has released the prisoners. We must keep them from reaching the walls. They will overpower our guards and open the gates to the enemy. Britt, see that the searchlight is trained on the gates. We must stop those fellows before it is too late. Time enough to hunt for the traitor later on!"

Two minutes later a swarm of armed men forsook the mock charity ball and sallied forth to engage in realities. Firing was soon heard at the western gate, half a mile away. Thither the eager pursuers rushed. The wide ray from the searchlight swung down upon this gate and revealed the forms of struggling men.

The prisoners had fallen suddenly upon the two Greeks who guarded the western gate, surprising them cleverly. Both fell under the clubbed guns of their adversaries. Chase and Selim were not more than a hundred yards away when the Greeks went down. The blinding glare of the searchlight aided the pursuers, who kept outside its radius. The fugitives, bewildered, confused by the bright glare in which they found themselves, faced the light boldly, five of them kneeling with guns raised to protect their two companions who started across the narrow strip, which separated them from the massive gate. Selim gave a shout and stopped suddenly, throwing his rifle to his shoulder.

"They have the keys!" he cried. "His rifle cracked a second later, and one of the two men leaped into the air and fell like a log. Chase understood the necessity for quick work and fired an instant later. The second

man fell in a heap thirty feet from the gate. His companions returned the fire at random in the direction from which the well aimed shots had come. "Under cover!" shouted Chase. He and Selim dropped into the shrubbery in time to escape a withering fire from outside the gates. The searchlight revealed a compact mass of men beyond the walls. It was then that the insiders realized how near they had come to being surprised and destroyed. A minute more, and the gates would have been opened to this merciless horde.

The prisoners, finding themselves trapped, threw themselves upon the ground and shrieked for mercy. Lord Deppingham and the others came up and, scattering well, began to fire at the mass outside the wall. The islanders were at a disadvantage. They could not locate the opposing marksmen on account of the blinding light in their faces. It was but a moment before

they were scrambling off into the dark wood, shrieking with rage. The five fugitives were compelled to carry their fallen comrades and the two Greeks from the open space in front of the gates to a point where it was safe for the defenders to approach them without coming in line with a possible volley from the forest. A small force was left to guard the gate. The remainder returned as quickly as possible to the chateau.

Immediately upon the return to the chateau an inspection of the dungeons was made, prior to an examination of the servants in the effort to apprehend the traitor. The three men who went down into the damp, chill regions below ground soon returned with set, pale faces. They had been no traitors.

The man whose duty it was to guard the prisoners was found lying inside the big cell, his throat cut from ear to ear, stone dead! He had been seized from within as he came to the grate in response to a call. While certain fingers slipped him into silence, others held his hands, and still others wrenched the keys from his sash. After that it was easy. Deppingham, Chase and Selim looked at each other in horror, and strange as it may seem, relief.

Dead was there; but, after all, death is no traitor. CHAPTER XXI. THE JOY OF TEMPTATION. THERE was but little sleep in the chateau that night. The charity ball was forgotten or, if recalled at all, only in connection with the thought of what it came so near to costing its promoters. No further disturbances occurred. A strict watch was preserved; the picturesque drawbridge was lifted, and there were lights on the terrace and galleries; men slept within easy reach of their weapons. The sleep had begun in earnest. Men had been slain, and their blood was crying out for vengeance; the voice of justice was lost in the clamor of rage.

The princess was quite serene. She lightly announced that the present state of affairs was no worse than that which she was accustomed to at home. The court of Rapp-Thorberg was ever in a state of unrest, despite its outward suggestion of security. Outbreaks were common among the masses. Somehow they were suppressed before they grew large enough to be noticed by the wide world.

"We invariably come out on top," she philosophized, "and so shall we here. At home we always eat, drink and make merry, for tomorrow never comes." Soon after breakfast was over Chase announced his intention to visit each of the gates in turn. The princess strolled with him as far as the bridge at the foot of the terrace. They stopped in the shade of a clump of trees that hung upon the edge of the stream. As they were gravely discussing the events of the night Neenah came up to them from beyond the bridge. She saluted Chase gracefully to the "sahib." She had no eyes for royalty.

"Excellency," she began breathlessly, "let Selim who would have private speech with the most gracious sahib. It is to be quick, excellency. Selim is under the ground, excellency." "What's that?" It is so dark there that one cannot see, but Neenah will lead you. Selim has sent me. But come now!"

Chase felt his ears burn when he turned to find a delicate, significant smile on Geneva's lips. "Don't let me detain you," she said, ever so politely. "With pleasure to have exclaimed, 'Is Selim hurt?' he demanded of Neenah, who shook her head vigorously.

"Then there is no reason why you should not accompany us, princess." "I am not at all necessary to the undertaking," she said coldly, turning to leave him. "Selim has found fuses and gunpowder laid in the cellars, excellency—in the secret vaults," began Neenah eagerly, dividing the cause of the white lady's hesitation.

This astounding piece of news swept away the feeble barrier Geneva would have erected to accompany Chase into the cellars, a spirit of adventure overcoming certain scruples which might have restrained her under other conditions. Neenah led them through the wine cellars and down into the vaults beyond the dungeons. The princess clutched Chase's hand tightly as they stole through the bleak, chill corridor. She found herself wondering if the girl was to be trusted. What if she were leading them into a trap? She would have whispered her fears into Chase's ear had not a sharp "Sh!" come from the girl who was leading. Geneva felt a queer little throb of hatred for the girl—she could not explain it.

The dungeon was off to the right. They could hear the insistent murmur of voices, with now and then a laugh from the distant cells. The guard could be heard scoffing at his charges. With a caution that seemed wholly absurd to the two white people, Neenah guided them through the maze of narrow passages, dark as Erebus and chill as the grave. Chase checked a hysterical impulse to laugh aloud at the proceedings. It was like playing at a children's game.

He was walking between the two women, Neenah ahead, Geneva behind. Each clasped one of his hands. Suddenly he found himself experiencing an overpowering desire to exert the strength of his arm to draw the princess close—close to his insistent body. The touch of her flesh, the clutch of her cold little hand, filled him with the most exquisite sense of possession. The magnetism of life

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