

POOR CO

# The Man From Brodneys

By GEORGE BARR M'GUTCHEON

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[CONTINUED.]

"I beg your pardon," said Browne. "This is Lord Deppingham?"

"Yes," drawled Deppy, with a look which was meant to convey the impression that he did not know who the deuce he was addressing.

"Permit me to introduce myself. I am Robert Browne."

"Oh," said Deppy, as if that did not convey anything to him. Then, as an afterthought, "Glad to know you, I'm sure." Still he did not rise, nor did he extend his hand.

"Don't you intend to present me to Lady Deppingham?" he demanded bluntly without taking his eyes from Deppy's face.

"Oh—er—is that necessary?"

"Lady Deppingham," interrupted Browne, "I am Robert Browne, the man you are expected to marry. We are here for the same purpose, I suspect. We can't be married to each other. That's out of the question. But we can live together as if we—"

"Good Lord!" roared Deppy, coming to his feet in a towering rage. Browne smiled apologetically and lifted his hand.

"As if we were serving out the prescribed period of courtship set down in the will. Believe me, I am very happily married, as I hope you are. The courtship, you will perceive, is neither here nor there. Our every issue is identical, Lady Deppingham. Doesn't it strike you that we will be very foolish if we stand alone and against each other?"

"My solicitor," began Lady Deppingham and then stopped. She was smiling in spite of herself.

"Your solicitor and mine can get together and talk it over," said Browne blandly. "We'll leave it to them. I am quite ready to be a friendly ally, not a foe."

"Let me understand you," began Deppingham, cooling off suddenly. "Do you mean to say that you are not going to fight us in this matter?"

"Not at all, your lordship," said Browne coolly. "I am here to fight Taswell Skaggs and John Wyckholme, deceased. I think both of us will run no risk if we smash the will. If we don't smash it the islanders will cheerfully take the legacy off our hands."

"By Jove!" muttered Deppy, looking at his wife.

"Thank you, Mr. Browne, for being so frank with us," she said coolly. "If you don't mind, I will consult my solicitor." She bowed ever so slightly, indicating that the interview was at an end, moreover, that it had not been of her choosing.

"Any time, your ladyship," said Browne, also bowing. "I think Mrs. Browne wants to speak to you about the rooms."

"We are quite settled, Mr. Browne, and very well satisfied," she said pointedly, turning red with a fresh touch of anger.

"I trust you have not taken the rooms at this end?"

"We have. We are occupying them."

"I'm sorry," said Browne. "We were warned not to take them. They are said to be unbearable when the hot winds come in October."

"What's that?" demanded Deppingham.

"The book of instructions and description which we have secured sets all that out," said the other. "It's strange that the servants didn't warn you."

"The—the confounded servants left us yesterday before we came, every mother's son of 'em. There isn't a servant on the place."

"What? You don't mean it? I say, Britt, come here a moment, will you? Lord Deppingham says the servants have struck."

The American lawyer, a chubby, red faced man of forty, with clear gray eyes and a stubby mustache, whistled softly.

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Browne. Got to have cooks, eh, Lord Deppingham?" Without waiting for an answer he dashed off. The native carriers were leaving the grounds when Britt's shrill whistle brought them to a standstill. The lawyer waved a triumphant hand to his friends and then climbed into one of the litters to be borne off in the direction of the town.

"He'll have the servants back at work before 2 o'clock," said Browne calmly. Deppingham was transfixed with astonishment.

"How—how the devil do you—does he bring 'em to time like that?" he murmured. He afterward said that if

he had had Saunders there at that humiliating moment he would have kicked him.

"They're afraid of the American battleship," said Browne.

"But where is the American battleship?" demanded Deppingham, looking wildly to sea.

"They understand that there will be one here in a day or two if we need it," said Browne, with a sly grin.

"That's the bluff we've worked," he looked around for his wife and, finding that she had gone inside, politely waved his hand to the Englishman and followed.

At 3 o'clock Britt returned with the rebellious servants—or at least the "nick" of them, as he termed the scores he had chosen from the hundred or more. He seemed to have an Aladdin-like effect over the horde.

Calmly taking Lord Deppingham and his following into his confidence, he said, in reply to their indignant remonstrances, later on in the day:

"I know that an American man-of-war hasn't any right to fire upon British possessions, but you just keep quiet and let well enough alone. They just simply know that I can send wireless messages and that a cruiser would be out there tomorrow if necessary, peering away at these green hills with cannon balls so big that there wouldn't be anything left but the horizon in an hour or two. You let me do the talking. I've got 'em bluffed, and I'll keep 'em that way."

Over in the gorgeous vesting Lord Deppingham later on tried to convince his sulky little wife that the Americans were an amazing lot, after all. Bromley tapped at the door.

"Tea is served in the hanging garden, my lady," she announced. Her mistress looked up in surprise, red-eyed and a bit disheveled.

"Ask some one to bring the tea things in here, Bromley," she said sternly. "Besides, I want to give some orders. We must have system here, not Americanisms."

The tea things did not come in. In their stead came pretty Mrs. Browne.

"Won't you please join Mr. Browne and me in that dear little garden? It's so cool up there, and it must be dreadfully warm here. Really, you should move at once into Mr. Wyckholme's old apartments, across the court from ours. They are splendid. But now do come and have tea with us."

CHAPTER VIII THE MAN FROM BRODNEYS

It was quite forty-eight hours before the Deppinghams surrendered to the Browns. They were obliged to humbly admit in the possession of their own councils that it was to the obnoxious but energetic Britt that they owed their present and ever growing comfort.

"Good looking."

"As the tall stranger stepped from the boat to the pier Von Blitz turned a look of triumph upon Britt, who he allowed through the crowd a moment

late in the afternoon of the day following the advent of the Browns. Lord and Lady Deppingham were laboriously fanning themselves in the midst of their stifling Marie Antoinette elegance.

"By Jove, Aggy, it's too beastly hot here for words," growled he for the hundredth time. "I think we'd better move into your grandfather's rooms."

"Now, Deppy, don't let the Browns talk you into everything they suggest," she complained, determined to be stubborn to the end. "They know entirely too much."

"That's all very good, my dear, but you know quite as well as I that we made a frightful mistake in choosing these rooms. It is cooler on that side of the house. I'm not too proud to be comfortable, don't you know?"

The next day they moved into the west wing, and that evening they had the Browns to dine with them in the banquet hall. Deppingham awoke in the middle of the night with violent cramps in his stomach.

"Don't say a word to Lady Deppingham," he grunted, sitting up in bed and gazing wildly at his valet. "But I've been poisoned. The servants—snobs—don't you know! Might have known. Silly ass! See what I mean? Get something for me—quick!"

For two hours Antoine applied hot water bags and soothing sirups, and his master, far from dying as he continually prophesied, dropped off into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning Deppingham, fully convinced that the native servants had tried to poison him, unconditionally discharged the entire force.

Of course there was a great upheaval. Lady Agnes came tearing down to the servants' hall, followed directly by the Browns and Mr. Britt.

"Stop!" she cried. "Deppy, what are you doing? Discharging them after we've had such a time getting them? Are you crazy?"

"They're a pack of snakes—I mean snakes. They're assassins. They tried to poison every one of us last night!"

Britt smoothed the troubled waters with astonishing ease. The servants returned to their duties, but not without grumbling and no end of savage glances, all of which were leveled at the luckless Deppingham.

"Why poison?" demanded Britt. "They've got knives and guns, haven't they?"

"My dear man, that would put them to no end of trouble cleaning up after us," said Deppingham loftily.

Meanwhile it may be well to depict the situation from the enemy's point of view—the enemy being the islanders as a unit. They were prepared to abide by the terms of the will so long as it remained clear to them that fair treatment came from the opposing interests. Rasula, the Ararat lawyer, in mass meeting had discussed the documents. They understood its requirements and its restrictions; they knew by this time that there was small chance of the original beneficiaries coming into the property under the provisions. Later came the news that marriage between the heirs was out of the question. Then the islanders laughed as they toiled. But they were not to be caught napping. Jacob von Blitz, the superintendent, stolid Englishman that he was, saw fat into the future. It was he who set the native lawyer unceremoniously aside and urged competent representation in London. The great law firm headed by Sir John Brodneys was chosen. A wide awake representative of the distinguished solicitors was now on his way to the island with the swarthy gentleman which had created so much interest in the metropolis during its brief stay.

Jacob von Blitz came to the island when he was twenty years old. That was twenty years before the death of Taswell Skaggs. He had worked in the South African diamond fields and had no difficulty in securing employment with Skaggs and Wyckholme.

Von Blitz was shrewd enough to see that the grandchildren were not coming to the island for the mere pleasure of sojourning there; their motive was plain. It was he who advised—even commanded—the horde of servants to desert the chateau.

He lived, with his three wives, in the hills just above and south of the town itself. The Englishmen who worked in the bank and the three Boer foremen also had houses up there, where it was cooler, but Von Blitz was the only one who practiced polygamy. His wives were Persian women and handsome after the Persian fashion.

One hot, dry afternoon about a week after the reopening of the chateau, the sista of a swarthy population was disturbed by the shouts of those who kept impatient watch of the sea. Five minutes later the whole town of Ararat knew that the smoke of a steamer lay low on the horizon. No one doubted that it came from the stack of the boat that was bringing Rasula and the English solicitor. Joy turned to exultation when the word came down from Von Blitz that it was the long looked for steamer, the Sir Joshua.

Von Blitz stood on the landing place to welcome Rasula and his comrades and to be the first to clasp the hand of the man from Brodneys.

At last his figure could be made out on the forward deck. His straw hat was at least a head higher than the turban of Rasula, who was indicating to him the interesting spots in the hills.

"He's big," commented Von Blitz comfortably, more to himself than to his neighbor. "And young," he added a few minutes later. Bowles, standing at his side, offered the single comment:

"Good looking."

"As the tall stranger stepped from the boat to the pier Von Blitz turned a look of triumph upon Britt, who he allowed through the crowd a moment

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