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THE MAN FROM BRODNEY

Continued from page 2

[illegible] Well, we've [illegible] all we can [illegible] left, my lord. [illegible] If it will be all right with your lordship, sir [illegible] anything that [illegible] out of place, [illegible] of you. Saunders [illegible] I'll give you trouble [illegible] I have decided [illegible] married before it [illegible] for [illegible] and they [illegible] not broadly.

"Married before you die?"

"That's [illegible], my lord. Hay, hay! It would be a bit late, wouldn't it, if we were [illegible] afterward. Haw, haw! Sudden! Sir! I have come to ask if you think it will interfere with your arrangements if—if we should be married tonight?"

"I'm sure, Saunders, that it won't disorganize us in the least," said his lordship genially. "By all means, Saunders, let it be tonight, for to [illegible] Clo."

"Will you kindly speak to her ladyship, sir?"

"Gladly. And I'll take it as an honor if you will permit me to give away the bride."

"Thank you, my lord," cried Saunders, his face beaming. His lordship shook hands with him, whereupon his cup of happiness overflowed, notwithstanding the fact that his honeymoon was likely to be of scarcely any duration whatsoever.

The wedding took place that night in the little chapel. Chase deliberately took possession of the princess after the hollow wedding supper had come to an end. Her mood had changed. Now she was quite at ease with him. The taunting gleam in her eyes presaged evil moments for his peace of mind.

"I'm inspired," he said to her. "A wedding always inspires me."

"It's very strange that you've never married," she retorted. She was striding freely by his side, confident in her power to resist sentiment with mockery.

"Will you be my wife?" he asked abruptly. She caught her breath before laughing tolerantly and then looked into his eyes with a tantalizing ingenuousness.

"By no means," she responded. "I am not oppressed by the same views that actuated Miss Pelham. You see, Mr. Chase, I am quite confident that we are not to die in two weeks."

"I could almost wish that we could die in that time," he said.

"How very diabolical!"

"It may seem odd to you, but I'd rather see you dead than married to Prince Karl." She was silent. He went on, "Would you consent to be my wife if you felt in your heart that we should never leave this island?"

"I think I shall go in, Mr. Chase," she said, with a warning shake of her head.

"Don't, please! I'm not asking you to marry me if we should leave the island. You must give me credit for that," he argued whimsically.

"Ah, I see," she said, apparently very much relieved. "You want me only with the understanding that death should be quite close at hand to relieve you. And if I were to become your wife, here and now, and we should be taken from this dreadful place—what then?"

"You probably would have to go through a long and miserable career as plain Goodwife Chase," he explained.

"If it will make you any happier," she said, with a smile in which there lurked a touch of mischievous triumph, "I can say that I might consent to marry you if I were not so positive that I will leave the island soon. You seem to forget that my uncle's yacht is to call here, even though your cruisers will not."

"I'll risk even that," he maintained stoutly.

She stopped suddenly, her hand upon his arm.

"Do you really love me?" she demanded earnestly.

"With all my soul, I swear to you," he replied, staggered by the abrupt change in her manner.

"Then don't make it any harder for me," she said. "You know that I could not do what you ask. Please, please be fair with me. I—I can't even jest about it. It is too much to ask of me," she went on, with a strange firmness in her voice. "It would require centuries to make me forget that I am a princess, just as centuries were taken up in creating me what I am. I am no better than you, dear, but—but—you understand?" She said it so pleadingly, so hopelessly, that he understood what it was that she could not say to him. "We seldom, if ever, marry the men whom God has made for us to love."

He lifted her hands to his breast and held them there. "If you will just go on loving me I'll some day make you forget you're a princess." She smiled and shook her head. Her hair gleamed red and bronze in the kindly light; a soft perfume came up to his nostrils.

* * * * * * *

The next day three of the native servants became violently ill, seized by the most appalling convulsions. At first a thrill of horror ran through the chateau. The plague—the plague in reality!

But these fears were quickly dissipated. The sufferers soon began to [illegible]. By nightfall they were fairly well recovered. The mysterious seizure however, was unexplained. Chase alone divined the cause. Poison! He was sure of it! But who the poisoner?

All previous perils and all that the future seemed to promise were forgotten in the startling discovery that came with the fall of night.

Lady Deppingham and Robert Browne were missing. They had disappeared as if swallowed by the earth itself! Neenah, the wife of Selim, was the last of those in the chateau to see the heirs. They crossed the swift torrent by the narrow bridge at the base of the cliff and stepped below the mouth of the cavern which blew its cool breath out upon the hanging garden. Later on she saw them climb the stanch ladder and stand in the black opening, apparently enjoying the cooling wind that came from the damp bowels of the mountain. Her attention was called elsewhere, and that was the last glimpse she had of the two people about whom centered the struggle for untold riches.

"Chase, they are lost in there!" groaned Deppingham, numb with apprehension. He was trembling like a leaf.

"There's just one thing to do," said Chase. "We've got to explore that cavern to the end. They may have lost their bearings and strayed off into one of the lateral passages."

"I—I can't bear the thought of her wandering about in that horrible place," Deppingham cried as he started resolutely toward the ladder.

"She'll come out of it all right," said Chase, a sudden compassion in his eyes.

Drusilla Browne was standing near by, cold and silent with dread, a set expression in her eyes. Her lips moved slowly, and Deppingham heard the bitter words: "You will find them, Lord Deppingham. You will find them!"

He stopped and passed his hand over his eyes. Then, without a word, he snatched a rifle from the hands of one of the patrol and led the way up the ladder. Chase turned to the white faced princess and said between his teeth:

"If Skaggs and Wyckholme had been in the employ of the devil himself they could not have foreseen the result of their infernal plotting. I am afraid—mortally afraid!"

"Take care of him, Hollingsworth," she whispered shuddering.

"Goodby, Genevra, my princess," said Chase softly and then was off with Britt and Selim. As he passed Drusilla he seized her hand and paused long enough to say:

"It's all right, little woman, take my word for it. If I were you, I'd cry. You'll see things differently through your tears."

The four men, with their lights, vanished from sight a few moments later. Chase grasped Deppingham's arm and held him back, gravely suggesting that Selim should lead the way.

They were to learn the truth almost before they had fairly begun their investigations.

The heirs already were in the hands of their enemies, the islanders!

The eager searchers, shouting as they went, had come to what was known as the "cathedral." This was a wide, lofty chamber, hung with dripping stalactites, far below the level at which they began the descent. The floor was almost as flat and even as that of a modern dwelling. Here the cavern branched off in three or

"Von Blitz's powder kegs did all this."

four directions, like the tentacles of a monster devilfish, the narrow passages leading no one knew whither in that tomblike mountain.

Selim uttered the first shout of surprise and consternation. An instant later they were standing at the edge of a vast hole in the floor—newly made and pregnant with disaster.

A current of air swept up into their faces. The soft, loose earth about the rent in the floor was covered with the prints of naked feet; the bottom of the hole was packed down in places by a multitude of tracks. Chase's bewildered eyes were the first to discover the presence of loose, scattered masonry in the pile below, and the truth dawned upon him sharply. He gave a loud exclamation and then dropped lightly into the shallow hole.

"I've got it!" he shouted, stooping to peer intently ahead. "Von Blitz's powder kegs did all this. The secret passage runs along here. One of the discharges blew this hole through the roof of the passage. Here are the walls of the passage. By heaven, the way is open to the sea!"

"My God, Chase!" cried Deppingham, staggering toward the opening. "These footprints are— They've murdered her! They've come in here and surprised—"

"Go easy, old man! We need to be cool now. It's all as plain as day to me. Rasula and his men were explorers the moment after the discovery of the treasure chamber. They came upon this new made hole and then crawled into the cavern. They surprised Browne and— Yes, here are the prints of a woman's shoe—and a man's too. They are gone. God help 'em!"

Signs of a fierce struggle were found near the entrance to the cathedral. Bobby Browne had made a gallant fight. Blood stains marked the [illegible] floor and walls, and there was evidence that a body had been dragged across the chamber.

Britt put his hand over his eyes and shuddered. "They've settled this contest, Chase, forever!" he groaned.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PURSUIT.

DEPPINGHAM sprang to his feet with a fierce oath on his lips. His usually listerless eyes were gleaming with something more than despair. There was the wild light of unmistakable relief in them. It was as if a horrid doubt had been scaled from the soul of Lady Deppingham's husband.

"We must follow!" shouted his lordship, preparing to lower himself into the jagged opening. "We may be in time!"

"Stop, Deppingham!" cried Chase, leaping to his side. "Don't rush blindly into a trap like that. They've got an hour or more start of us. Nothing will be accomplished by rushing into an ambush. They'd kill us like rats. Rasula is a sagacious scoundrel. He'll not take the entire responsibility. There will be a council of all the headmen. It will be of no advantage to them to kill the heirs unless they are sure that we won't live to tell the tale. They will go slow now that they have the chief obstacles to victory in their hands."

"If they will give her up to me I will guarantee that Lady Agnes shall relinquish all claim to the estate," announced the harassed husband.

"They won't do that, old man. Promises won't tempt them," protested Chase. "We've got to do what we can to rescue them. I'm with you, gentlemen, in the undertaking—first, for humanity's sake; second, because I am your friend; last, because I don't want my clients to lose all chance of winning out in this controversy by acting like confounded asses. It isn't what Sir John expects of me."

In the meantime the anxious coterie in the chateau were waiting eagerly for the return of the searchers. Drusilla made one remark, half unconsciously, no doubt, that rasped in the ears of the princess for days. It was the cold, bitter, resigned epitome of the young wife's thoughts:

"Robert has loved her for months." That was all.

Mr. and Mrs. Saunders, thankful that something had happened to divert attention from their own conspicuous plight, were discoursing freely in the center of a group composed of the four Englishmen from the bank.

"It's a plain out and out elopement," said Mrs. Saunders, fanning herself vigorously.

"But, my dear," expostulated her husband, blushing vividly over the first public use of the appellation, "where the devil could they elope to?"

"I don't know, Tommy, but elopers never take that into consideration. Do they, Mr. Bowles?"

At last the four men appeared in the mouth of the cavern. The watchers below fell into chilled silence when they discovered that the missing ones were not with them. Stupefied with apprehension, they watched the men descend the ladder and cross the bridge.

"They are dead," fell from Drusilla Browne's lips. She swayed for an instant and then sank to the ground unconscious.

* * * * * * *

In the conference which followed the return of the searchers it was settled that three of the original party should undertake the further prosecution of the hunt for the two heirs. Lord Deppingham found ready volunteers in Chase and the faithful Selim. They prepared to go out in the hills before the night was an hour older. Selim convinced Chase that the wily Rasula would carry his captives to the mines, where he was in full power.

"You're right, Selim. If he's tried that game we'll beat him at it. Ten to one if he hasn't already chucked them into the sea they're now confined in one of the mills over there."

They were ready to start in a very short time. Selim carried a quantity of food and a small supply of brandy. Each was heavily armed and prepared for a stiff battle with the abductors.

"We seem constantly to be saying goodby to each other." Thus spoke the princess to Chase as he stood at the top of the steps waiting for Selim. The darkness hid the wan, despairing smile that gave the lie to her sprightly words.

"And I'm always doing the unexpected thing—coming back. This time I may vary the monotony by failing to return."

"I should think you could vary it more pleasantly by not going away," she said. "You will be careful?"

"The danger is here, not out there," he said meaningly.

"You mean me? But, like all danger, I soon shall pass. In a few days I shall say goodby forever and sail away."

(To be Continued)