

The Man From Brodneys By GEORGE BARR M'UTCHEON



records of the Inebriate's asylum are to be credited. His wife, after enduring him for sixteen years, secured a divorce...

A handsome young soldier of fortune, a princess of enchanting beauty, two eccentric adventurers who leave wills disposing of the island of Japat and its raby mines, two heirs who must marry within a year to inherit the property despite the fact that they are already married...

don't see how anything short of Providence can alter the situation. "Thank heaven, Bowen, he names you as executor, not me."

CHAPTER I THE LATE MR. SKAGGS

THE death of Taswell Skaggs was stimulating, to say the least, inapplicable though the expression may seem. He attained the end of a hale old age by tumbling aimlessly into the mouth of a crater on the island of Japat, somewhere in the mysterious south seas.

"That's their unfortunate lookout. You are to act as an executor, not as a matrimonial agent." "But, man, it's an outrage to give all of it to those wretched islanders."

In Boston the law firm of Bowen & Hare was puzzling itself beyond reason in the effort to anticipate and circumvent the plans of the firm of Bosworth, Newnes & Grapewin, London, E. C.

"Perhaps he owes it to them. He doubtless bought it for a song, and, contrary to all human belief, he may have resurrected a conscience."

Without seeking to further involve myself I shall at once conduct the reader to the nearest of these law offices.

It is by this time safe for the reader to assume that Mr. Taswell Skaggs had been a rich man and therefore privileged to be eccentric.

There was one very important, perhaps imposing, feature in connection with the old gentleman's will—he was decidedly sound of mind and body when it was uttered.

To be "jolly well even" with him Mrs. Skaggs did a most priggish thing. She died six months later, but before doing so she made a will in which she left the entire estate to her daughter, effectually depriving the absent husband of any chance to reclaim his own.

"Read it again, Bowen." "The will?" "No, the letter."

Taswell Skaggs was in Shanghai when he heard the news. It was on a Friday. His informant was that erstwhile friend Jack Wyckholme. Naturally Skaggs felt deeply aggrieved with the fate which permitted him to capitulate when unconditional surrender was so close at hand.

"Extraordinary state of affairs, I must say." "And I don't know what to do about it. I don't even know how to begin. They're both married."

"There's naughtin' in England for me, Jackie. My gal's a bloomin' foreigner by this time, and she'll sell the bloodin' farm, of course. She's an American, God bless 'er heart. I dare say if I'd gone to 'er and say I'd like my fella back again she'd want to fork over, but 'er 'usband wouldn't be for that sort of extravaganza. 'E'd boot me off the island."

"And if that all important clause in the will is not carried out to the letter the whole fortune goes to the bowwows."

"The United States isn't an island, Tazzy," explained Mr. Wyckholme, gulping his brandy and soda. Mr. Wyckholme was the second son of Sir Somebody-or-other and had married the vicar's daughter. This put him into such bad odor with his family that he hurried off to the dogs—and a goodly sized menagerie besides if the

CHAPTER II AN EXTRAORDINARY DOCUMENT

Skaggs and Wyckholme as their dual career drew to a close set about to learn what had become of their daughters. Investigation proved that Wyckholme's daughter had married a London artist named Ruthven. The Ruthvens in turn had one child, a daughter. Wyckholme's wife and his daughter died when this grandchild was eight or ten years old. By last report the grandchild was living with her father in London. She was a pretty young woman, with scores of admirers on her hands and a very level head on her shoulders.

Wyckholme held to his agreement with Skaggs by bequeathing his share of the property to him, but it was definitely set forth that at the death of his partner it was to go to Agnes Ruthven, the grandchild—with reservations. Skaggs found that his daughter, who married Brown, the American, likewise had died, but that she had left behind a son and heir. This son, Robert Brown, was in school when the joint will was designed, and he was to have Skaggs' fortune at the death of Wyckholme in case that worthy survived.

In order to keep the business and the property intact and under the perpetual control of one partnership the granddaughter of Wyckholme was to marry the grandson of Skaggs within the year after the death of the surviving partner. The penalty to be imposed upon them if the conditions were not complied with, neither to be excusable for the deflection of the other, lay in the provision that the whole industry and its accumulated fortune, including the land and that they owned practically the entire island, were to go to the islanders. Wyckholme named Sir John Alencomble as one executor, and Skaggs selected Alfred Bowen of Boston as the other.

As Wyckholme was the first to die, Skaggs became sole owner of the island and its treasures, and it was he who made the final will in accordance with the original plans. The island of Japat, with its jewels and its ancient chateau, of modern construction, represented several million pounds sterling. Wyckholme's dream of erecting an exact replica of a famous old chateau found response in the equally whimsical Skaggs, who constantly bemoaned the fact that it was impossible to spend money. For five years after its completion the two old men, with an army of Arabian retainers and Nubian slaves, lived like oriental potentates in the huge structure on the highlands overlooking the sea.

Skaggs seldom went from one part of his home to another without a guide. It was so vast and so labyrinthine that he feared he might become lost forever. The dungeon below the chateau and the moat with its bridges were the especial delight of these lonely, romantic old chaps. One of the builders of this rare pile was now sleeping peacefully in the sarcophagus beneath the chapel; the other was lying dead and undiscovered in the very heart of his possessions.

The magnificent plans of the partners would have been a glorious tribute to romance had it not been for one fatal obstacle. The trouble was that young Miss Ruthven and young Mr. Brown did not know that their grandfathers lived, much less that they owned an island in the south seas. Therefore it is quite natural that they could not have known they were expected to marry each other.

Miss Ruthven, from motives peculiar to the head and not to the heart, set about to earn a title for herself. Three months before the death of Mr. Skaggs she was married to Lord Deppingham, who possessed a title and a country place that rightfully belonged to his creditors. Mr. Brown, just out of college, hung out his shingle as a physician and surgeon and forthwith, with all the confidence his profession is supposed to inspire, proceeded to marry the daughter of a brokerage banker in Boston and at once found himself struggling with the difficulties of Back Bay society.

A clause in the will, letter of instruction attached, demanded that the two grandchildren should take up their residence in the chateau within six months after the death of the testator, there to remain through the compulsory days of courtship, up to and including the wedding day. Four months had already passed. It was also stipulated that the executors should receive £10,000 each at the expiration of their year of servitude, provided it was shown in court that they had carried out the wishes of the testator or in falling had made the most diligent effort within human power. "It is very explicit," murmured Mr. Hare for the third time. "I suppose the first step is to notify young Mr. Brown of his misfortune. His lordship has the task of breaking the news to Lady Deppingham."

"Consult an attorney," advised Mr. Bowen promptly. "I'll do it," shouted Bobby Browne, one time halfback on his college eleven. "Break the will for me, Mr. Bowen, and I'll give!" "I can't break it, Bobby. I'm its executor."

"Good Lord! Well, then, who is the best will breaker you know, please? Something has to be done right away." "I'm afraid you don't grasp the situation. Now, if you were not married it would!" "I wouldn't give up my wife for all the islands in the universe. That's settled. You don't know how happy we are. She's the!"

"Yes, yes, I know," interrupted the wily Mr. Bowen. "Don't tell me about it. Go and see Judge Garrett, over in the K. building. They say he expects to come back from the grave to break his own will."

Ten minutes later an excited young man rushed into an office in the K. building. "You will have to fight it jointly," said Judge Garrett after extracting the wheat from the chaff of Browne's remarks. "You can't take her away from me. You can't!"

"I don't mean to do that," said the young man. "I'm just here to see you about my father's will. He left me a fortune, and I want to know what to do with it. He said I was to have it, but I'm not sure I can get it. He said I was to have it, but I'm not sure I can get it. He said I was to have it, but I'm not sure I can get it."

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"It's as sound as the rock of Gibraltar," from her, and she can't get yours. We must combine against the natives. Come back tomorrow at 2."

Promptly at 2 Brown appeared, eager eyed and nervous. He had left behind him at home a miserable young woman with red eyes and choking breath who bemoaned the cruel conviction that she stood between him and fortune.

"But, hang it all, dearest, I wouldn't marry that girl if I had the chance. I'd marry you all over again today if I could," he had cried out to her, but she wondered all afternoon if he really meant it. It never entered her head to wonder if Lady Deppingham was old or young, pretty or ugly, bright or dull. Judge Garrett had a copy of the will in his hand. He looked dubious, even dismayed.

"It's as sound as the rock of Gibraltar," he announced dolefully. "You don't mean it!" gasped poor Bobby, mopping his fine Harvard brow, his six feet of manhood shrinking perceptibly as he looked about for a chair in which to collapse. "C-can't it be smashed?"

"It might be an easy matter to prove either of these old gentlemen to have been insane, but the two of them together make it out of the question." "Darned unreasonable!" "What do you mean, sir?" indignantly.

"I mean—oh, you know what I mean—the conditions and all that. Why, the old chumps must have been trying to prove their grandchildren insane when they made that will. Nobody but imbeciles would marry people they'd never seen." "But the will provides for a six months' courtship. Mr. Brown, I'm sorry to say. You might learn to love a person in less time and still retain your mental balance, you know, especially if she were pretty and an heiress to half your own fortune. I dare say that is what they were thinking about."

"You should be prepared for the best—I mean the worst. Don't look like a sick dog. You go to the island at once. Take your wife along if you like. You'll find her ladyship there, and she'll need a woman to tell her troubles to. I don't think we'll have any trouble getting the British heirs to join in the suit to overthrow the will. The only point is this—the islanders must not have the advantage that your absence from Japat will give to them. Now, I'll!"

"But I don't like the suggestion that my wife will be obliged to die in order!" "Please leave all the details to me, Mr. Brown. It may not be necessary for her to die. There are other alternatives in law. Give the lawyers a chance. All you have to do is to plant yourself on that island and stay there until we tell you to get off."

"Or the islanders push me off," lugubriously. "Young Mr. Brown went away at dusk, half reeling under the responsibility of existence, and eventually reached the side of the anxious young woman uptown. He heard the facts and awaited the wall of dismay."

"I think it will be perfectly jolly!" he cried instead and kissed him rapturously. Over the opposite side of the Atlantic the excitement in certain circles was even more intense than that produced in Boston. Lord Deppingham needed the money, but he was a whole day in grasping the fact that his wife could not have it and him at the same time. The beautiful and fashionable Lady Deppingham, once little Agnes Ruthven, came as near to having hysteria as Englishwomen ever do, but she called in a lawyer instead of a doctor. For three days she neglected her social duties (and they were many), ignored her gallant admirers (and they were many) and hurried back and forth between home and chambers so vigorously that his lordship was seldom closer than a day behind in anything she did.

There was a great rattling of trunks, a jangling of keys, a thousand good-bys, a castoff season, and the Deppinghams were racing away for the island of Japat, somewhere in the far south seas.

CHAPTER III INTRODUCING HOLLINGSWORTH CHASE. THE excitement attending the Skaggs-Wyckholme revelations had not yet spread to the grand duchy of Rapp-Thorberg, apparently lost as it was in the cluster of small units which went to make up a certain empire, one of the world powers. The Grand Duke Michael disclaimed the world at large. He had but little in common with anything that moved beyond the confines of his narrow domain. His court was sleepy, lackadaisical, unemotional, impregnable to the taunts of progression. His people were thrifty, stolid and absolutely stationary in their loyalty to the ancient traditions of the duchy. His army was a mere matter of taxation and not a thing of pomp or necessity.

The precise location of the grand duchy in the map of the world has little or nothing to do with this narrative. Indeed, were it not for the fact that the grand duke possessed a charming and most desirable daughter the Thorberg dynasty would not be mentioned at all. The grand duke's peace of mind had been severely disturbed—so severely, in fact, that he was transferring his troubles to the emperor, who, in turn, felt obliged to communicate with the United States ambassador, who, in his turn, had no other alternative than to take summary action in respect to the indiscretions of a fellow countryman. Chase's conscience was even and serene, and he was resigning his post with the confidence that he had performed his obligations as an American gentleman should, even though the performance had created an extraordinary commotion. Chase was new to the old world and its customs, especially those rigorous ones which surrounded royalty and denied it the right to venture into the commonplace.

Chase had been the representative of the American government at Thorberg for six months. The American flag floated above his doorway in the Friedrichstrasse, but in all his six months of occupation not ten Americans had crossed the threshold. He was a vigorous, healthy young man, and it may well be presumed that the situation bored him. He was not a politician; no more was he an office seeker. He was a real soldier of fortune in search of affairs—in peace or in war, on land or at sea. Possessed of a small income sufficiently adequate to sustain life if he managed to advance it to the purple age, but wholly incapable of supporting him as a thrifless diplomat, he was compelled to make the best of his talents, no matter to what test they were put. He left college at twenty-two, possessed of the praiseworthy design to earn his own way without recourse to the \$4,500 income from a certain trust fund. His plan also incorporated the hope to save every penny of that income for the possible "rainy day." He was now thirty. In each of several New York banks he had something like \$4,000 drawing 3 per cent interest, while he picked his blithe way through the world on \$2,500 a year, more or less, as chance ordained.

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(Continued next week.)