

The Man From Rodney's

GEORGE BARR
MCUTCHEON

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CHAPTER XIV.

FROM THE ENEMY.

RODNEY was up and about early the next morning. He had his rolls and coffee set in the shady park for the princess, whose sense of duty had not been lessened by the night before. In the shade of the trees, beyond the fountain, he saw the princess. "I am here," she said in a low voice. "But, I am wise in you to be thinking of some devil. It's a most habit-thinking of other people's secrets."

"My dear, the prince isn't dead, falling into his hands makes quite a difference. He is splendid. Pray resume your seat, for they were agreeable. I'll not blow the secret. By the way, I have a letter for you. Brownie says more beautiful than any I have ever dreamed of. He is a very unhappy about my letter. I don't see why I like him that of a red as so animal."

"Why should you come to my hair. It's been there once to that of a Jersey cow. Now, looking toward the lower part of this frivolous man had just entered toward them. Both receding in gray dannels. He was not intruding," Chase said. His gaze was as bright as the prince's quite impersonal.

"Not at all," said Depplingham, his heart leaping to the way to the bungalow. He was likely to be opened to have you here. You've been most unkind to have presented me. Oh, he was sure. Stupid of me."

"No," she said, with a smile, which would have been if he had been preying else. As a matter of fact, she was in the bungalow who expects to be at straws.

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"I stay to enjoy the uncertain ones. I am not in the least alarmed on my own account. The object of my visit, Lord Depplingham, is to ask you to be on your guard up here. After the next steamer arrives and they learn that Sir John will not withdraw me in submission to Rasula's demand, with the additional news that your solicitors have filed injunctions and have begun a bitter contest that may tie up the estate for years—then, I say, we may have trouble. It is best that you should know what to expect. I am not a traitor to my cause in telling you this. It is no more than I would expect from you were the conditions reversed."

"It's mighty decent in you, Chase, to put us on our guard. Would you mind talking it over with Brownie and me after luncheon? You'll stay to luncheon, of course?"

"Thank you. It may be my death sentence, but I'll stay."

In the wide east gallery they saw Lady Depplingham and Bobby Browne deeply engrossed in conversation. Depplingham started and involuntarily allowed his hand to go to his temple as if to check the thought that flitted through his brain.

"Good Lord," he said to himself, "is it possible that they are considering that—Saunders' proposition? Surely they can't be thinking of that!"

As he led the way across the green Brownie's voice came to them distinctly. He was saying earnestly:

"The mere fact that we have come out to this blessed isle is a point in favor of the islanders. Chase won't overlook it, and you may be sure Sir John Rodney is making the most of it. Our coming is a guarantee that we consider the will valid. It is an admission that we regard it as sound. If not, why should we recognize its provisions, even in the slightest detail? Britt is looking for hallucinations and all!"

"Sh!" came in a loud hiss from somewhere near at hand, and the two in the gallery looked down with startled eyes upon the distressed face of Lord Depplingham. They started to their feet at once, astonishment and wonder in their faces. They could scarcely believe their eyes. The enemy!

He was smiling broadly as he lifted his helmet, smiling in spite of the discomfort that showed so plainly in Depplingham's manner.

Chase was warmly welcomed by the two heirs. Lady Agnes was especially cordial. Her eyes gleamed joyously as she lifted them to meet his smiling gaze. She was amazingly pretty. The conviction that Chase had mistaken her for Lady Agnes the evening before took a fresh grasp upon the mind of the Princess Genera. A shameless wave of relief surged through her heart.

Chase was presented to Drusilla Browne, who appeared suddenly upon the scene, coming from no one knew where. There was a certain strained look in the Boston woman's face and a suspicious redness near the bridge of her little nose.

"It's very good of you," said the enemy after all of them had joined in the invitation. "Why is it that I am more fortunate than your own attorneys? I am but a humble lawyer, after all, no better than they. Would you mind telling me why I am honored by an invitation to sit at the table with you?" The touch of easy sarcasm was softened by the frank smile that went with it. Depplingham felt it his duty to explain.

"It's—it's—er—oh, yes, it's because you're a diplomat," he finally remarked in triumph. It was a grand recovery, thought he. "Saunders is an ass, and Britt would be one if Browne could only admit it, as I do. Rubbish! Don't let that trouble you. Eh, Browne?"

"Besides," said Bobby Browne breezily, "I haven't heard of your clients inviting you to lunch, Mr. Chase. The cases are parallel."

"I'm not so sure about his clients' wives," said Depplingham, with a vast haw-haw! Chase looked extremely uncomfortable.

"I am told that some of them are very beautiful," said Genera sedately. "Other men's wives always are, I've discovered," said Chase gallantly.

The party had moved over to the great stone steps which led down into the gardens. Chase was standing beside Lady Depplingham, and both of them were looking toward his distant bungalow.

"That is my home, princess. It is the first time I have seen it from your point of view, Lady Depplingham. I must say that it doesn't seem as far from the chateau to the bungalow as it does from the bungalow to the chateau. There have been times when the chateau seemed to be thousands of miles away."

"When in reality it was at your very feet," she said, with a bright look into his eyes. For some unaccountable reason Genera resented that look and speech.

"Is that really where you live?" she asked, so innocently that Chase had difficulty in controlling his expression.

At that instant something struck sharply against the stone column above Chase's head. At least three persons saw the little puff of smoke in the air, the distant crack of a rifle. The bullet had dropped at Chase's feet, floating the sound of the report came floating to their ears. No one spoke as he to their ears. No one spoke as he to their ears. No one spoke as he to their ears.

"If I had the love I'd call Brownie good and hard," said Britt over his shoulder. "It isn't right. It isn't decent. They disappear for hours at a time, and they're always got their heads together. Poor little Drusilla! She's from Boston, Chase, and can't retail extraordinary keenness on Chase's part to gather that her ladyship and Browne had suddenly decided to engage in what he would call a mild flirtation, but what Saunders looked upon as a real attack of love."

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"And, say, by the way, Saunders is getting to dislike you intensely."

"I can't help it if he loves the only stenographer on the island," said Chase easily. "You seem to be the only one who isn't in hot water all the time, Britt."

"Me and the princess," said Britt ironically. Chase looked up quickly, but the other's face was as straight as could be. "If you were a real gentleman you would come around once in a while and give her something to talk to instead of about."

"Does she talk about me?" quite steadily.

"They all do. I've even heard the white handmaids discussing you in glowing terms. You're a regular matinee hero up there, my—"

"Sellin'" broke in Chase. The Arab came to the table immediately. "Don't put so much liquor in Mr. Britt's drinks after this—mostly water," Britt grinned amiably.

"I say, Britt, you're not responsible for this affair between Browne and Lady Depplingham, are you?" demanded Chase abruptly.

"What do you mean?"

"I was just wondering if you could have put Browne up to the game in the hope that a divorce or two might solve a very difficult problem."

"Now that you mention it, I'm going to look up the church and colonial divorce laws," said Britt noncommittally after a moment.

"I advise you to hurry," said Chase coolly. "If you can divorce and marry 'em inside of four weeks, with no court qualified to try the case nearer than India, you are a wonder."

Chase was in the habit of visiting the mines two or three times a week during work hours. The next morning after his conversation with Britt he rode out to the mines. When he reached the brow of the last hill, overlooking the wide expanse in which the men toiled, he drew rein sharply and stared at what lay before him. Five hundred half-naked brown men were congregated in the shade of the trees far to the right. By the aid of his glasses he could see that one of their number was addressing them in an earnest, violent harangue. It was Von Blitz. From time to time faint sounds of shouts came across the valley.

Chase shuddered. He knew what it meant.

"How about Allah now, Selim?" he asked sententiously.

"Allah is great. Allah is good," murmured the Moslem youth, but without heart.

"Do you think he can save me from those dogs?" asked the master, with a kindly smile.

"Selim, do not go among them today," implored Selim impulsively. "They are expecting me, Selim. If I don't come they will know that I have flunked. They'll know I am afraid of them."

"Do not go today," persisted Selim doggedly. Suddenly he started, looking intently to the left along the line of the hill. Chase followed the direction of his gaze and uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise.

Several hundred yards away, outlined against the blue sky beyond the knob, stood the motionless figure of a horse and its rider—a woman in a green habit. Chase turned his horse's head and rode rapidly toward her. She had left the road to ride out upon the crest of the green knob. Chase was in the mood to curse her temerity.

As he came up over the slope she turned in the saddle to watch his approach. He had time to see that two grooms from the stables were in the road below her. She smiled as he drew up beside her, not noticing his unconscious frown.

"Those are the fabulous mines of Japan!" she said gaily, without other greeting. "Where is the red glow from the rubies?"

"Who gave you permission to ride so far from the chateau?" he demanded, almost harshly. She looked at him in amazement.

"Am I a trespasser?" she asked coldly. "I beg your pardon," he said quickly. "I did not mean to offend. Don't you know that it is not safe for you to—"

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I am not afraid of your shadows. Why should they disturb me?"

"Look!" He pointed to the distant assemblage. "Those are not shadows. They are men, and they are making ready to transform themselves into beasts. Before long they will strike Von Blitz and Rasula have sunk my warships. You must understand that it is dangerous to leave the chateau on such rides as this. Come! We will start back together at once."

"I protest, Mr. Chase, that you have no right to say what I shall do or—"

"It isn't a question of right. You are nearly ten miles from the chateau, in the most unfrequented part of the island. Some day you will not return to your friends. It will be too late to hunt for you then."

"How very thrilling!" she said, with a laugh.

"I beg of you, do not treat it so lightly," he said, so sharply that she flushed. He was looking intently in the direction of the men. She was not slow to see that their position had been discovered by the miners. "Will you come with me now?"

"It seems so absurd! But I will come, of course. I have no desire to cause you any uneasiness."

As they rode swiftly back to the tree-lined road a faint chorus of whistles came to them across the valley. For some distance they rode without speaking a word to each other. They had traversed two miles of the soft dip road before Chase discovered that Selim was the only man following them. The two men who had come out with the princess were not in sight.

"The dogs! No, you see, princess, your escort was not to be trusted," said Chase grimly.

"I was glad that you understood," he said simply. His gaze was set straight before him, alert, anxious.

"I begin to fear, Mr. Chase," she said, with a faint smile, "that Lady Depplingham deceived me in suggesting Japan as a rest cure. It may interest you to know that the court at Haps-Thoberg has been very gay this winter. My brother, Christobal, has been with us after two years' absence. He came with his wife from the ends of the earth, and my father forgave him in good earnest. Christobal was very disobedient in the old days. He refused to marry the girl my father chose for him. Was it not foolish of him?"

"Not if it has turned out well in the end."

"I dare say it has—or will. She is delightful. My father loves her. And my father—the grand duke, I should say—does not love those who cross him. One is very fortunate to have been born a prince." He thought he detected a note of bitterness in this rally.

"I can conceive of no greater fortune than to have been born Prince Karl of Brabets," he said lightly. She flashed a quick glance at his face, her eyes narrowing in the effort to divine his humor.

"As I was saying," she resumed after a moment, "Lady Depplingham has lured me from sin showers into the tempest. Mr. Chase"—and her face was suddenly full of real concern—"is there truly great danger?"

"I fear so," he answered. "It is only a question of time. I have tried to check this uprising, but I've failed. Last night Von Blitz, Rasula and three others came to the bungalow and coolly informed me that my services were no longer required. I told them to go to—"

"I understand," she said quickly. "It required courage to tell them that." He smiled.

"They protested friendship, but I can read very well as I run. But can't we find something more agreeable to talk about? May I say that I have not seen a newspaper in three months? There must be news that you can give me. I am hungry for it."

"You poor man! No newspapers! Then you don't know what has happened in all these months?"

"Nothing since before Christmas. Would you like to see a bit of news that I clipped from the last Paris paper that came into my hands?"

"Yes," she said, vaguely disturbed. He drew forth his pocketbook and took from its interior a small bit of paper. She read it at a glance and handed it back. A faint touch of red came into her cheeks.

"How very odd! Why should you have kept that bit of paper all these months?"

"You have been married nearly three months," he said reflectively—"three months and two days, to be precise."

She laughed outright, a bewitching, merry laugh that startled him.

"How accurate you would be!" she exclaimed. "It would be a highly interesting achievement, Mr. Chase, if it were only borne out by facts. You see, I have not been married so much as three minutes."

He stared at her, uncomprehending. She went on, "Do you consider it bad to postpone a wedding?"

"But they have stolen the horses," she murmured irrelevantly. "They belong to the chateau stables."

"Which direction did they take, Selim?"

"They rode off by the Carter's highway, excellency, toward Ararat."

"It may not appeal to your vanity, your highness, but it is my duty to inform you that they have gone to report our clandestine meeting."

"Glandstiel! What do you mean, sir?"

"The islanders are watching me like hawks. Every time I am seen with any one from the chateau they add a fresh nail to the coffin they are preparing for me. It's really more serious than you imagine. I must therefore forbid you to ride outside of the park."

"I dare say you are right, Mr. Chase," she said at last, quite frankly. "I thank you."

(Concluded next Saturday.)

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