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THE MAN FROM BRODNEY'S

Continued from page 3.

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 scampering 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. There had been no traitor!

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 grating in response to a call. While certain fingers choked 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.

Death 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 siege had begun in earnest. Men had been slain, and their blood was crying out for vengeance; the voice of justice was lost in the clamorings 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 gracefully to the "sahib."

She had no eyes for royalty. "Excellency," she began breathlessly, "it is Selim who would have private speech with the most gracious sahib. It is to be quick, excellency. Selim is under the ground, excellency."

"In the cellars?" "Yes, excellency. 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 Neenah's lips. "Don't let me detain you," she said, ever so politely. "Wait, please!" he 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, divining the cause of the white lady's hesitation.

This astounding piece of news swept away the feeble barrier Neenah would have erected in her plique. She consented 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. Neenah 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 hys-

terical 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 charged from one to the other, striking fire to the blood. He was forgetting Neenah, forgetting himself, thinking only of the opportunity and its fascination. In another instant he would have drawn her hand to his lips. Neenah came to a standstill and uttered a warning whisper. Chase recovered himself with a mighty start, a chill as of one avoiding an unseen peril sweeping over him. Geneva heard the sharp, painful intake of his breath and felt the sudden relaxation of his fingers. She was not puzzled. She, too, had felt the magic of the touch, and her blood was surging red. She knew then that she had been clasping his hand with a fervor that was as unmistakable as it was shameless.

Neenah may have felt the magnetic current that coursed through these recharged creatures. She was smiling mysteriously to herself.

"Wait here," she whispered to Chase, ever so softly. She released his hand and moved off in the blackness of the passage. "I will bring Selim," came back to them.

"Oh!" fell faintly, tremulously, from Geneva's lips. It was a trap, after all! But it was not the trap laid by a traitor. She fell all aquiver. Her heart fluttered violently; her breath came quickly. Alone with him, and their blood leaping to the touch that thrilled!

Chase could no more have restrained the hand that went out suddenly in quest of hers than he could have checked his own heart throbs. A wave of exquisite joy swept over him—the joy of a temptation that knew no fear, no conscience. He found her cold little hand and clasped it in tense fingers—fingers that throbbled with the call to passion. He drew her close; their bodies touched and sweetly trembled.

"Are you afraid?" he whispered in tones he had never heard before.

"Yes," she murmured convulsively—"of you! Please, please, don't!" At the same time she tightened her clasp upon his hand and crept closer to him, governed by an unconquerable craving. Chase had the sensation of smothering. He could not believe the senses which told him that she was responding to his appeal.

"Genevra!" he murmured, almost gasped, in his delirium. His arms went about her slender figure suddenly, and she was strained to his breast, locked to him with bonds that seemed unbreakable. Her face was lifted to his. The blackness of the passage was impenetrable, but love was the guide. He found her lips in one wild, glorious kiss.

A door creaked sharply. He released her. Their quivering arms fell away. They drew ever so slightly apart, still under the control of the influence which had held them for that brief moment. She was trembling violently. A soft, wailing sigh as of pain came from her lips.

Then the glimmer of a light came to them through the half open door at the end of the passage. They gazed at it without comprehension, dumb in their sudden weakness. A shadowy figure came out through the door, and Selim's voice, low and tense, called to them.

"Forgive me," he murmured. "It is too late," she replied. Then his hand sought hers again, and, dizzy with emotion, he led her up to the open door. As they passed into the huge, dimly lighted chamber he turned to look into her face. She met his gaze, and there were tears in her eyes. Selim was ahead of them. She shook her head sadly, and he understood.

"Can we ever forget?" she murmured plaintively. "Never!" he whispered. "Then we shall always regret—all ways regret!" she said, withdrawing her hand. "It was the beginning and the end."

"Not the end, dearest one—if we are always to regret," he interposed eagerly. "But why the end? You do love me! I know it! And I worship you—oh, you don't know how I worship you, Genevra!" "Hush! We were fools! Don't, please! I do not love you: I was carried away by— Oh, can't you understand? Remember what I am! You knew and yet you have degraded me in my own eyes. Is my own self respect nothing? You will laugh and you may boast after I am married to—"

"Genevra!" he protested as if in great pain. "Excellency," came from the lips of Selim at the lower end of the chamber, breaking in sharply upon their little world, "there is no time to be lost." Time to be lost! And he had held her in his arms! Time to be lost! All the rest of time was to be lost! "They may return at any moment."

Chase pulled himself together. He looked into her eyes for a moment, finding nothing there but a command to go. She stood straight and unyielding on the very spot which had seen her trembling with emotion but a moment before.

"Coming, Selim," he said, and moved away from her side as Neenah came toward them from the opposite wall. Geneva did not move. She stood quite still and numb, watching his tall figure crossing the stone floor. Ah, what a man he was! The little Persian wife

Continued on page 5.

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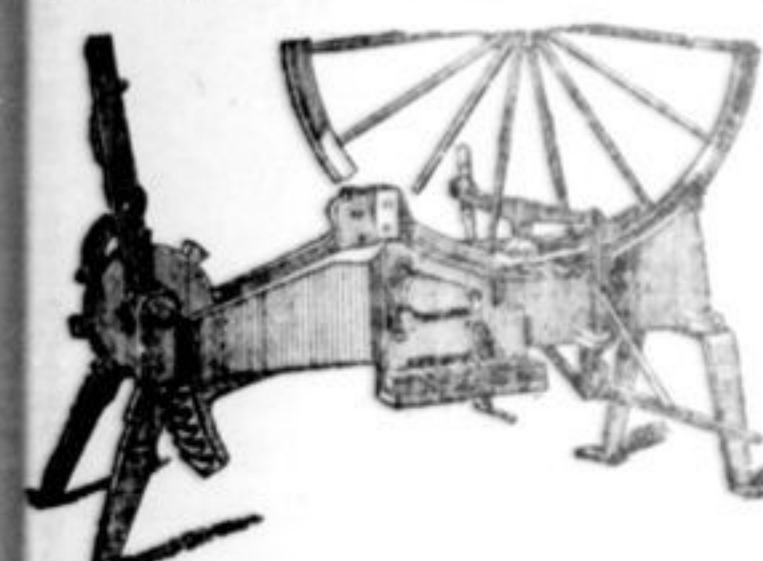
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