

*To Few Is It Permitted to Penetrate Into
the Afterlife, But This Experience Was
Given to the Dissolute Tom Crissey*

A GLIMPSE BEYOND

By H. M. HAMILTON

BEFORE I tell this, I want to make one thing plain. I am not—and never have been—what they call a spiritualist. I've never even thought about such things. Before prohibition, I was always too busy selling booze at a place of mine on Third Avenue. After prohibition—well, I may as well be frank!—I was still busy doing the same thing.

Once, however, I heard a fellow talk about the subject. Arthur Delano, his name was—a nice, quiet, bookish sort of chap, without a trace of swelled head. One thing he said I remember:

“Life—in this world or the next—is simply a matter of adjusting oneself to one's environment!”

Humbug! I thought. It didn't make any sense to me—then. I thought it was high-brow bunk. I might have forgotten it altogether by this time, if it hadn't been brought to mind rather forcibly on another occasion, by the same man. I'd like to write it down just as I recall it.

I had been out at Jake Dyer's place on the Larchmont Road for three days, drinking. The third morning I fell in with a girl who went by the name of Hilda Gronner. She asked me to take her in to town with me. I knew I ought to be attending to business—you've got to watch those cash-register chaps—so I said all right; I'd drive her in.

This Hilda Gronner was pretty in a poisonous sort of way: white-skinned like a fungus, with little brown eyes. I was more or less crazy about her.

Well, I had my ninety-horse-power speedster waiting for her in the inn courtyard, and was sitting there quietly, smoking, when I happened to see this man Delano I've mentioned. He didn't notice me, at first, but he motioned to a waiter and asked him to call a taxi. In a few minutes the taxi came. I knew the driver of it, incidentally, a red-headed lad by the name of Rafferty. Delano saw me and came over and shook hands, then he excused himself as a very pretty young woman came out. The two

of them got into Rafferty's yellow cab and drove off.

It was some little time before Hilda showed up; when she did she seemed sore about something. I asked her what was wrong; she said she didn't like to ride with a drunken man. She meant me. That made me mad: I wasn't drunk, though I had had a couple of bracers while I waited.

We started off at a good clip. I wasn't in a very good humor, so I let the old boat out a little. We made between fifty and sixty an hour on some stretches of straight road. I wanted to show her I wasn't too drunk to drive, anyhow. She squealed and caught my arm to make me slow down. I tried to put one arm around her, but she slapped my face, and told me to watch what I was doing.

Then, just at a turn outside Bay Chester, I clamped down the brakes tight to keep from smashing into a yellow machine that stood in the middle of the road. We slid along and came to a stop. I saw that the man working with the engine was Rafferty.

“Need any help, Terence?” I sang out.

“Yes, but I need more help than you can give me, Tom Crissey, I'm thinkin',” he said, his face brick-red with exertion and anger. “I've done everything I know to do, and devil a foot will she stir! I stand to lose a ten-dollar tip over this breakdown.”

“That's too bad,” I told him. “Anything I can do I'll be glad to—”

“Go on,” whispered Hilda to me. “You ain't called on to earn his ten dollars for him.”

“You can do something, Tom,” said Rafferty. “This gentleman and the lady have to be at Grand Central inside of the hour . . . and it'll take that long for me to get a garageman. If, now, you could take the two of them—”

“Oh, that you, Tom?” said Delano, looking out. “It's Mr. Crissey, a friend of mine—” he told the woman with him. Then to me—“This is the second breakdown since Stamford. My car gave up

the ghost just beyond that roadhouse. . . and now this one!”

He laughed ruefully.

“I guess we're hoodooed, Lucy.”

Well, I had no choice except to go over to be introduced, though Hilda was looking black as a storm-cloud over the delay. Lucy Dean was the young lady's name.

“Though it won't be, long,” added Delano, smiling.

She blushed, and held out her hand to me with a smile I liked, not at all as if I were an outcast, which is the way most women of her sort usually looked at me.

“I'm glad to meet you,” she said.

And then, before I knew it, I had asked them to ride in with us.

“It may crowd you a bit,” I said, “but I'll get you there in time to catch your train, anyhow.”

“We're not catching it,” said Delano. “We're meeting it. Lucy's sister is coming to New York for the wedding—Lucy and I are to be married tomorrow, Tom. We have now just—” he looked at his watch—“forty-one minutes to get there. It can't be done. I'd better phone a message.”

“I'll get you there,” I promised, “if you fix it up with Rafferty, the lad that brought you. It wasn't his fault.”

Delano did so; then they got in—a pretty tight fit. I opened her up wide. We were doing fifty-five before we had gone a hundred yards.

“For God's sake!” whispered Hilda in my ear. “Cut it out! What do we care whether they meet her sister or not?”

For answer I opened her up another notch, and we took the curve on the rims of two wheels. Then I saw, just ahead, a child, walking across the road, slowly, the way a hen does. Hilda swore, and Miss Dean screamed softly.

Perhaps, if I had had time to think it out, I might have reasoned that our four lives were worth more than the child's one. But I didn't: I shot the car off to one side, straight at a stone wall outside the curve.

There was no time to say a word—we just went bang at it, and hit with a crash. . . a sort of flare-up of dazzling light in my eyes. . . and then I seemed to be going through an endless tunnel, with faint voices shouting in the midst of a darkness that roared. . .”

IT MAY have been longer or shorter, but it seemed to me just about a minute later that consciousness came back to me. Oddly enough, I had no feeling of being hurt at all; but I seemed, somehow, light as a feather, as though I were not in the midst of the smash-up at all, but floating in air somewhere above it. And besides, I could see—plainly, too. . .”

“Funny!” I remember thinking. “There’s the machine down there, sure enough, in the turn of that wall. But—where the devil am I?”

Yes: I saw the car, smashed into scrap-iron; and there was a huddle of human shapes in it. But I was away from it all, looking down on it as if from mid-air!

While I looked, I saw two forms extricate themselves. One was Hilda. She staggered clumsily to her feet, and fumbled foolishly with her hair. The other—a woman also—had a blood-stained cut on her forehead, but she paid no attention to it. She was tugging at a limp body that lay half under the wrecked machine.

“Arthur!” I heard her cry pitifully. “Arthur! It’s Lucy! Speak to me!”

Then she turned to the child who had been the cause of the whole thing, and who, quite unhurt, stood there staring stupidly.

“Run!” she cried. “Back up the road! There is a man there, working on an automobile. Tell him there has been an accident, and that he must get a doctor. Hurry!”

Finally the child got the idea, and started off, turning back sometimes to look at the wreck. Lucy Dean had Arthur Delano’s head in her lap, and kept talking to him in a low tone: “Arthur! Can’t you speak to me, dear?”

I remember feeling very sorry for both of them, who were to have been married the next day. Then I thought: How puzzling it was, that I was able to look down on the whole thing, and yet seemed unable to give any aid. All of a sudden a voice said, quite close beside me:

“Since it had to be one of us, I’m glad it wasn’t Lucy.”

The voice was Arthur Delano’s—and it was close beside me! And yet—down there lay Arthur Delano, to all appearance dead!

“What does it mean?” I asked. “Where am I—and where are you?”

“You,” he said calmly, “are down under the steering wheel, I think.”

“But that’s nonsense!” I cried. “I can’t be there—I’m here! Yet there is somebody there—all twisted up—and he has a cap and a suit like mine. . . . but. . . .”

A sort of horror froze me: “That can’t be. . . I’m up here, talking to you! Who’s that down there?” I said hysterically.

In the silence that followed I could hear Lucy Dean’s voice again:

“Can’t you hear me, Arthur? Can’t you speak to me?”

“Yes, dear,” answered the voice beside me, quietly, “I can speak, but you can’t hear me!”

I saw Hilda walk to the side of the road and sit down on the grass.

“I don’t want to look!” she moaned. “He’s messed up terrible! My God! Why did I ever ask him to drive me—the way he was! I wish I hadn’t!”

For a moment the mystery of these things held me speechless; then like a flash the solution dawned on me.

“Why—damn it, Arthur!” I broke out, “it can’t mean that you and I are—”

“Yes,” he said calmly. “We’re dead. It’s—interesting, isn’t it?”

“My God!” I exclaimed weakly. “Interesting! It’s—awful!”

“It’s hard for —Lucy,” he added tenderly. “I wish I could make her hear.”

“Dead!” I mumbled the word to myself. “Nonsense! It can’t be! Why—*this* is too commonplace—too ordinary—just the way it was before. . . the trees and clouds and houses—everything! The only difference is, that I can’t seem to do anything, except float around up here, instead of being down there where I really am—in the wreck, under the steering-wheel!” I cried aloud: “Why—I can’t die like this! And by God, I won’t!”

With no more effort than the effort of thinking about it, I went down close to the wreck, and stopped short beside Hilda Gronner. She was quite unhurt, except for a scratch or so on her smooth white cheek.

“Hilda!” I shouted, as loud as I could.

Surely I could break down the invisible barrier between us, if I tried hard enough! And—near her—I was again aware of her cold, dangerous beauty, which appealed to my senses. I forgot everything else, in that appeal, and I touched her hand.

“Dear Hilda!” I repeated.

“Ugh!” she shuddered. “Something gives me the cold chills! What a mess for a careful girl to get into! I wish that doctor would hurry; I want to get away from this!”

“Don’t you understand?” I heard Delano’s voice. “You can’t touch her; you can never touch anything human again.”

I felt weak and sick.

“Say!” I whispered. “I need a drink—bad. D’you think I can get a drink somewhere?”

“The trouble with you—” the quiet voice observed—“is that you don’t seem to realize how extremely dead you are. You’re done with drink—and with girls—and all that sort of thing; you may as well know it.”

“But I don’t want to be dead!” I stormed. “I’ve got too many things to do yet. I’m young—I have my life to live. I’ve got money—and interests. . . there’s that mare I entered at Belmont. . . and I’ve got my place in town to look after! Who will attend to it?”

No one answered me.

I went on wildly: “Besides, there are so many things I want to do yet; I want to go abroad—and see the world! And the things I’ve done I want to do again. . . I want to run my speedster, with the wind in my face. . . I want to swim in deep water, and feel it cool on my body. . . I want to know some woman’s true love—before I die! My God, Arthur! I’m in love with life! I can’t die yet!”

“Yes, you are earth-bound,” he said, very quietly.

“Don’t play the hypocrite!” I retorted roughly. “You don’t want to die any more than I do. So don’t talk like a prig!”

“Naturally, I don’t want to die,” he answered. “I was just beginning to live. But the reason I don’t like being dead is on Lucy’s account. . . and as to that, I know she will come. So it doesn’t matter—except just for the moment.”

While he talked, I kept looking down at the limp thing that had been Delano. Lucy Dean was stroking the dead fingers, and whispering:

“Only a little while, dear. Then I’ll be with you. Wait for me.”

“You see,” he went on, “she understands. We’ve talked of these things often. We both thought there would be something—beyond. We tried to imagine what it would be like. . . to prepare for it, if we could.”

“You said once,” I broke in, “that life—beyond—was just a question of adjusting yourself to the things you’d find there.”

"That's what I mean, exactly!" he said. "We didn't know, of course, but we *thought*, that we would have some sort of life that wasn't physical; a new environment, that is to say. We love one another truly—and we can go on loving one another, not to speak of the many other things we care for together—music—and beautiful things in the world. We can still enjoy them, when we're together again. . ."

"But—what about *me*?" I demanded. "I've never learned to love anything—except the things I could do!"

"Well," said Delano. "You told me I talked like a prig. I don't want to. But it's hard to explain: You have never adjusted yourself to any environment except a physical one. You have a lot of habits; I don't mean to say that they are bad, but they are all habits belonging to that poor rag of a body of yours down there. You have never bothered with any other things. Now—without your body—you're lost. Do you see?"

I saw. How proud I had been of my strong young body—its activities, its beauty, its endurance, its keen senses! And there it lay, a broken machine that was truly all that there was of me, except a lot of dead habits and desires I could never again indulge!

"God!" I moaned. "If I could only have another chance!"

There was suddenly a stir of movement in the quiet countryside; the rapid-fire of a motor, then a little machine drew up to a grinding stop. Rafferty jumped out, then a little oldish man with a hand-satchel.

"Here's the doctor, Miss," said Rafferty to Hilda. "Awful, ain't it? Might just as easy have been me—as *them*!"

The doctor spent only a moment with Delano. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, my dear," he said to Lucy. "Where is the other one?"

Lucy could not speak. Hilda closed her vanity-case and pointed.

"Over here," she said. "I wish to heaven I'd never set eyes on him. It

don't do a nice girl no good to git mixed up in this sort of thing."

Without answering her, the doctor knelt beside what had been myself—Tom Crissey—straightening out the limbs, listening, prodding, and centering his attention upon a hideous gash at the top of the head. Hilda said:

"What's the use? He's dead. Can't you take me in to town?"

The doctor turned to Lucy Dean, saying:

"Singular case. So far as I can see, he *is* dead. There's no heart-action—no pulse—and yet his hands are warm and flexible. I wonder. . ."

He kept touching, poking, with his skillful fingers.

"I've seen odd things happen—with a fractured skull—compression—concussion. I may be wrong—but his pupil shows a faint reflex. . . I *think* . . ."

"Is there any hope?" asked Lucy. "I wish some one at least could be saved!"

"Hardly a chance in a million," said the doctor, taking out an instrument. "The man's almost certainly dead—yet I've half a mind to try to lift this bit of bone that is pressing in, and then run in with him to St. Stephen's. I'd like Doctor Owen to look at him."

Doctor Owen! I knew him: big, bluff, daring—no saint, either. I felt a queer touch of humor at the idea of one worldling trying to bring back another to life—and failing! But all this time the doctor's little spatula was prodding around. . . he put the end under a bit of skull, and lifted. No result! Then he lifted again—and I felt a horrible, sickening pain: The whole scene was wiped out as if by a sponge. . . and I was again in that roaring tunnel of darkness—of agony—and finally, of complete oblivion. . .

WHEN I opened my eyes, it was to see Doctor Owen's grizzled face grinning down to me—a reassuring grin.

"By Gad, Tom!" was his greeting. "I *did* bring you back! If ever there was a man three-fourths of the way into the

great beyond—you're the chap! But I think I've got you back now . . . with a little rest-up. . ."

I heard a soft voice I knew; Lucy Dean was bending over me.

"Laura," she said, "he's going to live!"

At the words, another young woman came and stood beside her—a beautiful girl whom I had never seen, but somehow—I can't explain why—it seemed to me I had always known her. . . or at least, always been waiting for her!

"I've done all I can do," said Doctor Owen to the two women. "But Tom is all right—or will be. He will be back at his place on Third Avenue before the month is out."

"We will stay and watch with him for a while, my sister and I—" said Lucy to the doctor.

He nodded. I could not speak; but my eyes followed the girl who was Lucy Dean's sister—Laura, her name was—about the room, hoping *she* wouldn't go. A man *can* feel that way about a girl, the first time he sees her!—I did!

It was later when I found my voice. I whispered to Lucy Dean:

"Two things. . . I want to tell you. . . and your sister. One is—I'm not going back to Third Avenue. The other. . . Arthur told me to tell you. . . it is all right. . . he will be waiting. . ."

She understood; she really knew that I had brought her a word from the dead! After a time she smiled through her tears.

"It was like him," she said, "to want me to know. . . But I knew—without being told! Thank you!"

I won't tell the rest—I needn't—except to say that—when I had come to know her sister Laura—and had told her that I wanted to begin over again—this time right—*she* understood too, that I had been given another chance—and that this time I wouldn't throw it away. We're married now; and we both know that when one of us goes into the beyond, there will be something. . . somebody to wait for!

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