

Ghost STORIES

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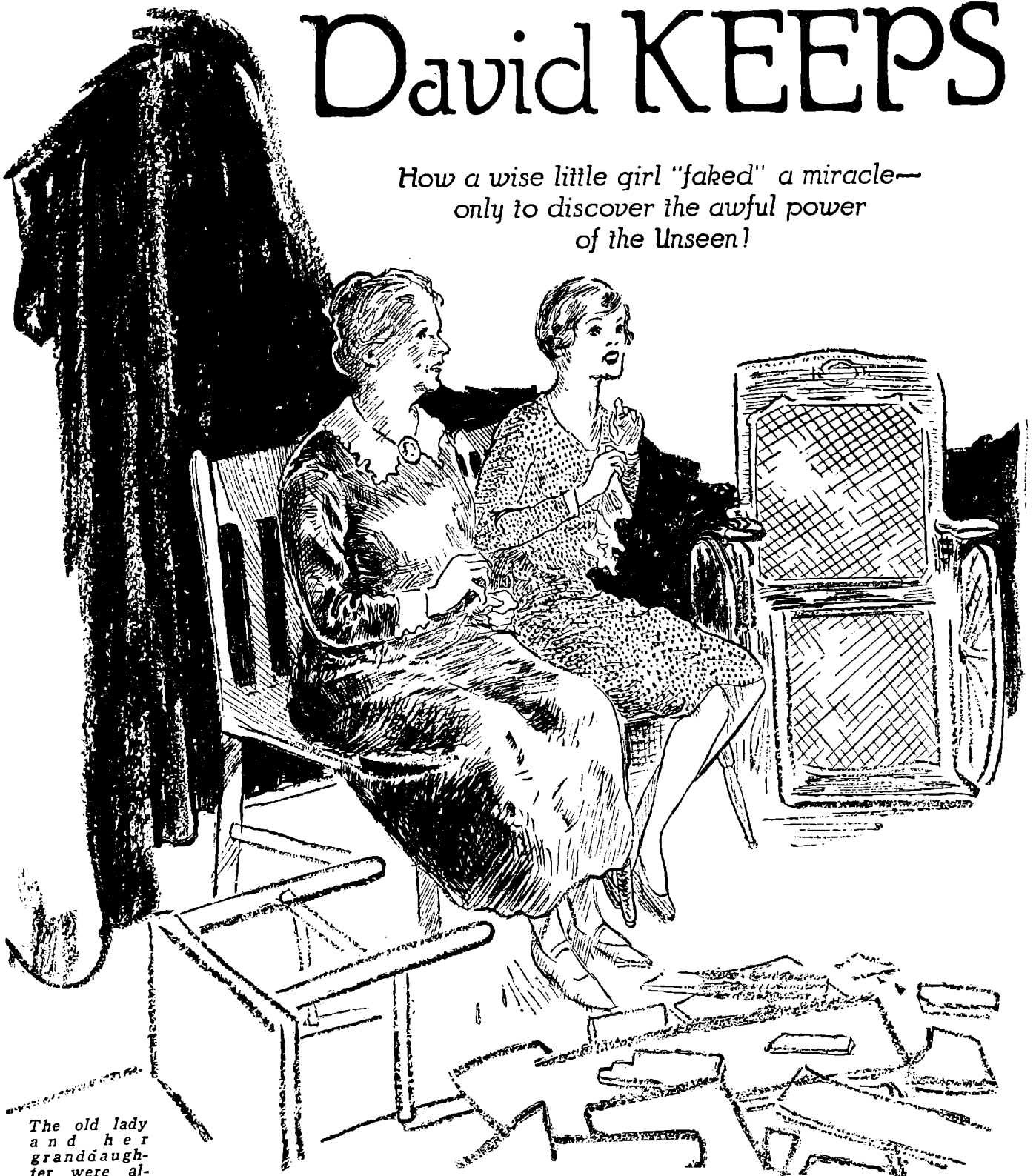
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David KEEPS

*How a wise little girl "faked" a miracle—
only to discover the awful power
of the Unseen!*



*The old lady
and her
granddaughter
were al-
most hysteri-
cal*

I'M sure I wouldn't blame anyone for not believing this story. I know I would not have believed it myself if anyone had told it to me a few years ago. And yet, the events I am about to relate had such a drastic effect upon my entire life that I feel I must write them down.

One of the most amazing things about the whole experience is the fact that it should have happened to me—hard-boiled, wise little Thelma Johnson—of all people! Why, I hadn't a vestige of belief in anything supernatural. Far from it. My mother died when I was only three years old, and from then until I was seventeen I traveled about the country with my father's carnival and medicine show. Before I had learned to read or write, I knew every "sucker

game" employed in such an enterprise, knew the answer to every "miracle" of the magician. When most kids of my age were starting to school, I was toe-dancing before Pop's tent to attract the crowds that Chick O'Brien, the barker, harangued inside to see "the greatest exhibit of magic and sorcery ever shown in this part of the world."

Pop was good, too. He did most of the stuff the better-known magicians did, and his audiences always left the tent wide-eyed with wonder. As I grew older, I changed from toe-dancing to Oriental or acrobatic—under the tutelage of old Ma Schlosky, who had the hot dog concession and used to be a dancer herself—and I took part in Pop's act, as well. I was at one time the girl who disappeared from inside the sealed cabinet; at another, the girl who, hypnotized, lay

His WORD

By
THELMA
JOHNSON



PAGE
TROTTER

Like a creature possessed, I danced to the rhythm of those unseen drums—inside the ring of green flames!

suspended in mid-air; and finally, that amazing phenomenon, who, before the audience's very eyes, was placed in a coffin, feet showing at one end, head at the other, and then was sawed in two. Inevitably, of course, I had a profound contempt for the credulous layman we called the "Sucker." As for religion, and the hereafter, such things interested me not at all. I believed only what I actually experienced—and not always that. All of which, as I said, makes the experience I am about to relate just so much more amazing.

When the story opens, I was twenty. Pop had been dead for three years; the carnival was a thing of the past; and I was almost broke. I had used what money Pop left me to get some more education, and had only succeeded in con-

vincing myself that I was all wrong. Book-learning was not for me. My knowledge would have to come from my contacts with life, as it had in the past. When Chick O'Brien, who had always been in love with me, asked me for about the two-hundredth time to marry him, I was almost in low enough spirits to consent—almost, but not quite. Instead, I stalled. I consented to join his new racket, on a partnership basis, and if it went as well as he thought it would, then I'd consider making him my partner for life.

CHICK'S new racket handed me a good laugh, but I thought it ought to go over big—with my able assistance. Briefly, it was this: He had taken an apartment, in the better section of a big mid-western city, under the name of "Professor Obrion." Then he let it be known, in the right quarters, that the "professor" was a student of the occult; that he read the stars, held séances, was able to foretell events, to read the past, the present and the future; that he

had even been known to effect really remarkable cures.

Oh, the "professor" was not commercial—far from it! So engrossed was he in his own private researches that it was most difficult to reach him. But occasionally—very occasionally—when someone had been able to secure his interest, to convince him that he or she was desperately in need, and worthy of his help, he had been known to drop his own work entirely and direct all his energies and powers toward helping the fortunate suppliant. In such instances, of course, his fees were enormous. But, after all, was that not as it should be?

"We've been playing a piker's game all these years, Thelma," he told me solemnly. "Now we're going to do the thing in an exclusive way. If it goes at all, it'll go big—and we'll be in the money. Are you game?"

I looked him over, studying the carefully cultivated new personality he had acquired—the pince-nez, the Vandyke beard, the quiet, faultlessly-cut clothes—and I could imagine a lot of people falling for his line. Then I looked about at the perfectly appointed apartment ("Done by one of these interior decorators," he told me proudly) and right there and then I capitulated.

"You're on, Chick," I told him. "I'll join the show." And we shook on it.

WELL, the racket went better than either of us dreamed it would. It's funny the way news travels. It wasn't any time before people began looking us up, begging the "professor" to help them out of some difficulty or other. But Chick would consider only the cream of the lot.

It was my job to act as reception clerk and secretary—among other things. I had to interview the applicants and discourage them as much as possible, thereby making them crazier than ever to get to the "professor." Incidentally, during the interview, I always found out as much about them as possible. Then Chick would investigate them, and if he decided to take them on, we would decide what method to use on them—and what use we would make of the information they had let slip to me. Then I would send for them, telling them the "professor" had decided to interview them, and from then on, the game started.

It wasn't long before we had quite a number of people who never undertook anything important without having the "professor" read the stars for them, and an almost equally large group who consulted the "spirits" about every important move they were going to make. We did all the usual stunts at our séances; I'd even go into a trance, on occasion, and pretend I was controlled by someone from the other world. Oh, I was good—if I do say it myself! I put on a thoroughly convincing act, and, backed by the "professor's" solemn and scholarly dignity, the performance went

over big—so big that my head was way up in the clouds.

We had been practicing successfully for over a year, and at Chick's insistence I had about decided to marry him, when the experience I have been leading up to occurred.

I had been out on an errand, I remember, leaving Chick in charge at the apartment. When I returned, I found him all steamed up.

"Caught a big fish, while you were away," he told me jubilantly.

"Meaning?" I countered.

"Ella Tompkins."

"Whoever that may be!"

"You know the old Tompkins house, next to the Telephone Building—the one old residence left in the downtown section?"

"Well? What about it?"

"Gee, you're dumb! The Tompkins are one of the city's oldest families. The old lady is worth oodles of money—and eccentric as the old Harry. Won't move out of the old family home in spite of the fact that all the other best families have gone over to the North Side."

"So! And what does the old girl want you to do for her?"

"Well, it seems she had a granddaughter who was on the road to becoming a great singer—the Metropolitan was going to give her a chance—when her throat went flooey. Paralyzed—due to shock of some sort. The old dame has had her everywhere for treatments, but so far no one has been able to help her any. She said she had heard about me and the wonderful cures I have effected, and wants me to try to cure her Genevieve."

"Good! What's the treatment to be?"

"Well, I've been thinking. . . . It will have to be a séance, but most of our usual stuff will have to be cut out—it wouldn't get across with these babies. We'll have to be very simple and dignified and impressive. Now—here's what I thought:

"Fortunately, they haven't seen you. We'll have you brought in at the first séance we hold. You'll be a dancer who has been injured by a fall, some time back. You'll be rolled in, in a wheel chair, paralyzed. And that first séance, you'll be cured. That's to prove to them that I actually can effect cures, see? The whole idea is to keep them coming back for more. I told them that the case might prove very difficult, but that I would do my best. I said I would only charge them for the time I actually spent with them—say, five hundred dollars a séance. Of course, I said, we might effect a cure the very first time, or we might have to try many times. And—would you believe it—the old lady never batted an eyelid. Said she knew I would do everything in my power, and she was deeply grateful for my interest.

"Kid, we're going to clean up at least ten grand on this outfit. We'll have to make each session so provocative they'll be convinced that next time sure the cure will be made. It will take some working out, but we can do it."

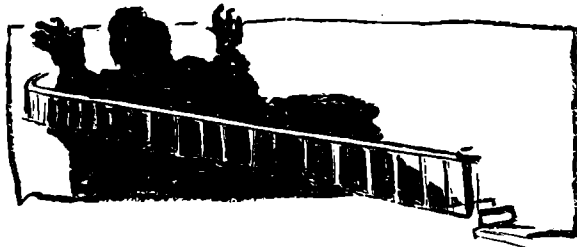
"Yes—but the cure? It seems sort of low to lead the poor things on, when we know darned well we can't cure the girl. It's not like taking people's money just for advice."

"Oh, you make me tired! They've been everywhere else, haven't they? And these other birds have taken their money and given them nothing, haven't they? If we don't get it, someone else will. If the girl could have been cured, she would have been, long before this. And if they're fools enough to go on throwing away their money—and they have plenty of it to throw—we might as well be getting it as the next guy."

I thought that over, and had to agree with him; but just the same, I didn't like the job, right from the first. However, ten thousand dollars looked like a lot of money to me, and I needed money. Therefore, in spite of my distaste for the affair, I went on and helped Chick plan that first séance.

Nor did I like the situation any better after meeting little old Mrs. Tompkins and her granddaughter, Genevieve De Witt. They were charming, well-bred, sincere people, with a pathetic belief in the "professor's" ability to help them. And the way they accepted me—though I knew my presence disconcerted them—the kindness and sympathy they showed me, believing me to be in trouble, made me feel like a dirty dog.

I was there waiting for them when they arrived—nicely made up to look wan and weak, in my wheel chair. Chick explained that I had been brought to him for treatment, by



someone he had helped; that I had had an accident, while dancing, and was paralyzed from the waist down; and that he had been unable to take me on, because he was so busy. However, he thought that perhaps, since our cases were so similar, they might be willing to let me attend their "treatments" in the hope that I, too, might derive some benefit from them.

"Of course I have made it plain to Miss Johnson that unless you are perfectly willing to have her, she cannot stay," he ended.

A look of the deepest sympathy crossed the face of little Mrs. Tompkins.

"SUPPOSE you tell us something about yourself," she said quietly. "Then we can decide."

That was my cue to hand her a good sob story, but I could only murmur:

"It—it will mean so much to me." The look of compassion in her eyes made me choke up and want to tear out of the room, to warn her that she was being cheated. Chick immediately took control of the situation by holding my hand, as though to reassure me—actually, I thought he would break my fingers, so fierce was his grip—and saying:

"Miss Johnson finds it difficult to talk about the situation. You see, it is almost a matter of life and death with her. She made her living by her dancing, and since the accident, of course, she has been unable to work. It has been very hard."

"Poor child!" murmured Mrs. Tompkins.

"Of course you must stay and take the treatments with me," said the De Witt girl, in her husky, whispery voice. "I know you will be helped, if I am—if it is possible to be helped by the professor's treatments."

"Thank — thank you, so much!" I managed to say, real tears brimming up in my eyes. These people, in their quiet black attire, certainly got under my skin as no one ever had before. They were so sincere, so simple, such thoroughbreds. I began to doubt my ability to play my part. It was certainly a new sensation.

Always sensitive to my moods, Chick must have realized my uncertainty, for he immediately swung into action.

"Well, since that's all settled," he said briskly, "let's start, shall we? Will you and your granddaughter step right this way, Mrs. Tompkins?"

He led the way down the hall to the séance room. When he returned, there was a steely look in his eyes, and he spoke quietly, but in no uncertain terms.

"What in hell's the matter with you?" he demanded. "Going soft on me?"

"I—I don't like this, Chick," I whispered.

"Well—you're in it, and you'd better like it. I didn't think I'd live to see the day when you'd fall down on a game. Your father would be proud of you——"

"Leave my father out of this!" I snapped, realizing full

well that he was right; that Pop would agree with him absolutely. Then, for the first time in my life I experienced a pang of shame at my father's mode of life—a reaction followed almost instantly by a feeling of horror that I could be so disloyal to his memory. Here was I, Bill Johnson's kid, breaking his first law—welching on a pal, going soft on a job! If he had been alive, he'd have beaten me up—then wept over the poor weakling that was his daughter. Gosh! No wonder Chick was sore. In a sort of panic I grabbed his hand.

"Chick—Chick, I'm terribly sorry. I don't know what struck me. Please forgive me," I pleaded. "I'll be all right now—you'll see!"

"Well—all right."

His eyes still frigid, he wheeled me down the hall, and the séance started. All during the experience, I had but one thought—to make good with Chick.

And what a performance we put on!

The heavily draped room was very dimly lighted when we entered, and already the shadowy forms of Mrs. Tompkins and her granddaughter were seated at the table in the center of the floor. Chick wheeled my chair over to them and seated himself next to me.

"Now then," he began, "will you all place your hands lightly on the table?"

We did as directed and sat for a time in silence. Then he spoke again:

"Spirits, are you there?"

Nothing happened, and we continued to wait. From time to time Chick repeated his question:

"Spirits, are you there?"

AT last we felt a tremor run through the table and I heard a gasp from Miss Tompkins on my right. Then the corner between Chick and me lifted and dropped with a resounding thwack.

"Oh, my! What's that?" trilled the little old lady.

"Silence, please," whispered the "professor." Then, louder: "Is there a friendly spirit in this room?" The table bounced about uncertainly, then settled down again. "Tap once for

'No', three times for 'Yes'" said Chick. Immediately the table leg rose and fell three times, with heavy thuds.

"Spirit, we need your help. Answer. Will you help us?" Again three knocks.

"Two of our number, Spirit, are afflicted by illness—by paralysis. All earthly means have failed to cure them. They now turn to the all-knowing dead for help. Spirit, can you cure them?"

This time there was only one short rap.

"No, the Spirit says it cannot cure them. Spirit, will you tell us who you are—spell out your name?"

Three enthusiastic raps this time.

"All right, start."

A series of raps commenced, at each of which, Chick called out a letter, "A, b, c, d——" There came a pause. "Is 'D' the first letter?"

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Three raps, then a short silence followed by one rap.

"One rap—'a'. Go on. D-a—"

The table continued until it had spelled out the word "David" and started on the "T" of the surname.

"It's David—it's my husband!" gasped Mrs. Tompkins, too excited to remember the professor's admonition of silence.

"Is it David Tompkins, husband of Ella Tompkins?" inquired Chick, solemnly.

The table almost leapt from the floor, so enthusiastic was its Yes.

"Oh, dear! Let me talk to him."

For fully ten minutes the séance was held up while the little old lady talked to her husband—or thought she did—asking questions, like: "Are you happy?" and "Is there really a hereafter?" Then she inquired: "Is Hesther, our dear daughter, there with you?"

"Yes," rapped the table.

"Can I speak to her?"

"No." Decidedly.

THIS baffled her for a moment, and during her silence Chick seized the opportunity to take control once more.

"David Tompkins, Hesther's daughter Genevieve—your granddaughter—is in desperate need of your help. Can you help her?"

"Yes," thumped the table.

"And will you help our friend, Thelma Johnson?"

"Yes."

Suddenly the table went limp under our hands and the professor seemed unable to budge it. After half a dozen futile demands of "Spirit, are you there?" and "David Tompkins, are you still in this room?" Chick sat back.

"He has evidently gone. But he said he would help us!"

This was my cue to beg the "professor" to try just once more, but I didn't get a chance.

"If David said he'd do a thing, he always did it." His widow's voice rang with pride and confidence. "We'd better wait right here. I know he'll be back."

"Well—" Chick acquiesced with apparent reluctance.

Once again we placed our hands on the table and waited, this time in silence. Then, suddenly, the surface under our hands seemed to leap into life. It trembled violently, then began to move about from side to side.

"David Tompkins, are you there?" demanded Chick's most sepulchral voice.

Instantly the table dropped back with a thud.

"David Tompkins is not there. Is there another spirit in this room?"

"Yes," thumped the table.

"Hesther!" breathed Mrs. Tompkins.

"Will you spell out your name for us?"

Yes, it would. It began to spell and Chick sounded off the letters.

"M-u-g-w-a-u-m-p-u-m. Mug Waumpum. Is that your name?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"M-e-d-i-c-i-n-e-m-a-n—Medicine Man? Are you an Indian Medicine Man?"

"Yes."

"Did David Tompkins send you to us?"

"Yes."

"Can you cure these two girls?"

"Yes."

"How?"

This time the table actually did leap from the floor and started for the door. I released my hold, but at Chick's whispered, "Keep your hands on it," the others rose from their chairs and moved across the room with it. Suddenly there was a crash and a stifled scream, as the table shattered to pieces on the floor.

"Don't be afraid, it's all right," Chick's voice reassured

them. "Get back to your seats—and keep perfectly still!"

The almost hysterical women obeyed, but the "professor" did not accompany them. For a few seconds he was strangely still.

"Professor," I called out. "Professor!"

There was no answer but a faint sound as of thunder—or drums.

"What's the matter? What's that?" One of the women whispered, and almost instantly Chick's voice came to us, in accents of terror.

"No! No! Go away! No, I say!" He was moving nearer to us—the sound of his heavy breathing was distinctly audible—and as he came, the tom-tom beating of drums sounded louder and louder. By now both women were too thoroughly frightened to utter a sound.

As he advanced into the circle of dim light in which we three sat huddled, he looked for all the world like an old Indian. He had wrapped the table cover about him, like a blanket, and in the semi-darkness his rumpled hair and stooping, tottering gait, completed the illusion.

Straight toward me he came, muttering broken words. Then his voice grew louder and he began to chant, in the harsh guttural tongue of the Indians. (We had once had a troupe of Navajos with our show and Chick had learned to pow-wow with them in their own language. The training was standing him in good stead now.) Straight toward me he came, still chanting, and laid his hands on my head. I let out a shriek. At this the drums sounded all about us like thunder and his hands began to make hypnotic passes over my face. . . .

Then slowly, slowly, he moved back from me, still chanting, and as he did so I rose bit by bit, until I was standing, tottering but upright, on my feet. The women beside me gasped, and the drums beat faster. Then the "professor," hands still stretched hypnotically toward me, stepped back, little by little, and I followed, as though under a spell. When I was well away from the others, he swooped, suddenly, and swiftly drew a circle about me on the floor—a circle which, next moment, became a blaze of unearthly green light.

Slowly, at first, as though still under a spell, I began to dance—the old, Oriental dance of the medicine-show days. Then, little by little, I increased the pace. Finally, like a creature possessed, I danced to the rhythm of those unseen drums—inside the ring of green flames!

The old lady and her granddaughter were almost hysterical.

Chick had withdrawn into the shadows and stood with arms crossed, Indian fashion, under his shawl, looking off into space with eyes apparently unseeing. The circle of green lights in which I had been moving, was gradually dying out, and as the last bit of unearthly-looking incandescence flickered out, the "professor" uttered a groan and collapsed in a heap upon the floor.

INSTANTLY the two women, who all this time had been sitting, apparently spellbound by the strange happenings, were on their feet.

"Something dreadful has happened!" gasped Miss De Witt, "Oh, dear, if only we could turn on some more light!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" groaned her grandmother. "What can we do?"

I stood swaying, my hand to my head, as though coming back to consciousness.

"What—what happened?" I gasped.

"You're—you're cured—miraculously!" came from Miss De Witt, breathlessly. "But the professor—something terrible has happened to him. We must do something. Oh, dear!" wringing her hands, "I don't know what to do—"

"He's—he's coming to," panted the little old lady, who had been bending over him, chafing his hands. The next moment Chick gave a faint groan, opened his eyes, and sat up,

holding his head. Honestly, he almost frightened me.

"Oh, my head!" he groaned. "My head!" Then, after a long shudder: "Tell me—what happened? What did I do? I—I felt someone battling for the control of my will—just after the table crashed—and after that, nothing, until I came to, here on the floor. Who was it? Was it control—by some spirit? Please tell me."

"It was that Indian Medicine Man," I told him, trying to sound thrilled, "and he cured me!"

"Oh, wasn't it too wonderful!" Mrs. Tompkins began to sob hysterically. "I've never been so shaken in my life," she cried. "Never!"

"Oh, how very wonderful! I'm so glad for you, my dear," the "professor" murmured, weakly. "And Miss DeWitt—didn't he help her?"

"No—no," Mrs. Tompkins had checked her weeping as suddenly as it had started. "But if he could cure Miss Johnson today, he'll surely help Genevieve next time. Wasn't he sent by my David, and didn't David promise to help them both? David *would* have him help Miss Johnson, first—as our—guest; he had such a sense of chivalry! Oh, my dears, I have no doubt, after what has happened in this room to-night, that our troubles are over. Genevieve is as good as cured, this very moment. Don't you feel it, too, my dear?" turning to her granddaughter.

"**Y**ES—oh yes! After what has happened to Miss Johnson before our very eyes, I'm convinced that at last we are on the right track," answered the girl solemnly in her odd voice. "When can we hold another séance, professor?"

"Not for a little while, I'm afraid. I'll have to let you know," he answered wearily, as though completely exhausted. "I have been in these trances before—not very often, but frequently enough so that I know what the after-effects will be. They are fearfully exhausting. And not until I have completely recovered, will it be safe to subject myself again to the strain. That is why," he concluded, "I cannot do more of this sort of work, much as I would like to be of service more often."

"I understand, professor. And I want to tell you again how very grateful my granddaughter and I both are for this wonderful communication." Little Mrs. Tompkins was almost in tears again, and Genevieve's voice, as she added her fervent, "Yes, indeed," was none too steady.

"And now, my dears, we must leave, and let the professor rest. Are you coming our way, Miss Johnson? We go downtown."

"Thank you, no. My friend is to call for me," I told the little woman. "I'll just wait in the reception room until he gets here."

Chick dragged himself up from the floor and walked to the door with us. He did, indeed, manage to look pale and haggard as he bade us a swift good-night and passed into a room beyond, with a brief, "You'll excuse me, I know."

"The dear man! It's beautiful the way he consents to spend his strength in such a noble work," murmured Mrs. Tompkins. "And you, dear—" turning to me, "I'm so very happy for you."

"And I—I can hardly believe what has happened," I answered.

"The professor has explained to you, of course, that you must not tell about what happens here," she admonished me. "It would give him unwelcome publicity—"

"Yes, I understand," I told her, wanting to laugh or cry—I didn't know which—at her seriousness.

"I want to talk with you some more, my dear," she went on. "This experience has drawn us very close together. Won't you let us give you tea, in a day or two, when you are entirely over the strain of all this, and used to being quite yourself again?"

"That would be lovely," I told her.

"Shall we say Thursday afternoon, then?"

"Thursday. And your address?"

She fumbled for a card which she handed me, then they were gone.

To tell the truth, I had no intention of keeping that appointment, but Chick insisted and I went, simply to keep peace. Chick was still sore at me, for weakening on him before the séance, and I didn't blame him much—that is, some of the time I didn't. I seemed to be running around in circles, emotionally.

There were times when I felt a terrific distaste for the Tompkins racket. So much so that I considered every way out, from leaving Chick to handle the affair himself, to going to the two women and confessing all. Then a feeling of self-contempt would set in and I would hate myself for even thinking of welching on my partner. In the end, my father's training told, though. Chick was my pal; I had agreed to go into this racket with him, and I must therefore see it through. Besides, as he said, the old lady had plenty of money to blow, and if we didn't get it, someone else most assuredly would.

So, at the appointed time, I called at the old Tompkins mansion. And what a relic of a place it was! Dingy and dusty and furnished but sparsely, in true mid-Victorian style—red plush hangings, flowered wallpaper and all.

To my surprise Mrs. Tompkins herself opened the front door for me and led the way into what she termed the "parlor." Tea was already set before the meager fire that crackled in the grate, and I found myself shivering with the damp chill of the place. As she poured my tea, the little old lady apologized for the absence of her granddaughter, explaining that she had been called away on business but might get back before I left. Then we settled down to discussing the subject nearest her heart—the cure of Genevieve. It was amazing to me how thoroughly sure she was that the girl would be cured at the next séance just as she believed I had been cured at the last one.

"It seems so remarkable," she said, "that fate should have sent you two girls to the professor at the same time, since your cases are so similar. I gather that your whole future existence—financially, I mean—depended upon your being cured—just as ours depends upon Genevieve's recovering her voice."

"With me—yes," I stammered, a sudden cold fear clutching at my heart. "But you—"

"With us it is perhaps even more important, because there are two of us. It's a long story. You see, Genevieve's father was a—what you would call a ne'er-do-well. He married my daughter, Genevieve's mother, and—deserted her before her baby was born. And I—well, of course I took care of them. There wasn't much money left, when David died—he had speculated unfortunately—and it took all of that, and what I could get by mortgaging the house here, to raise Genevieve and pay for her music lessons. The child had a divine voice, and we all three hoped, and believed, that one day it would make her both rich and famous.

"**T**HINGS went beautifully. We managed to send her abroad to study—it took managing, too, but we did it—and her teachers had the same hopes for her that we had. When she had her audition at the Metropolitan, she was acclaimed a huge success. She was to make her debut as Marguerite, in *Faust*, and then—this!"

"How dreadful! Tell me how it happened."

"Her mother was—killed. Run over by a motor car. Genevieve adored her, and the shock of her death simply prostrated the child. From that day to this she has never been able to sing a note." For a moment she was sadly silent. Then a bright smile lighted up her sweet face. "But that's all over now," she said with quiet certainty. "One more séance and then—Genevieve will sing again. I know it. All our plans and hopes for her will be realized, once she is cured."

For a moment I had to bite my lip to keep from screaming, from crying out that she had been cheated, hoodwinked, made

the victim of a couple of greedy charlatans. But at thought of what my words would do to her, I choked them back. It was too terrible, too hideous, this thing we had done! I must *do* something; yet what *could* I do? Make Chick lay off her, keep her from losing any more money, certainly. But that wouldn't give the girl back her voice—and that was the only thing that really mattered. Oh, it was cruel, after raising her hopes to such a certainty.

"Genevieve and I want to ask a favor of you," she was saying. "We three have been through this wonderful experience together, this far. Will you stand by us and see us through this other séance? It would mean so much to us."

"Why—why—I'd love to," I stammered, "but—you see, I must leave town tomorrow—"

"Oh, that's all right," she interrupted. "The second séance is to be tonight. I had a telegram from the professor, just before you came."

THE miserable double-crossing cheat! So he'd planned the séance for tonight without telling me! I was furious.

"That's why Genevieve had to go out," Mrs. Tompkins hurried on. "Tonight we will have to pay the professor—"

"I'm paying for the other séance," I burst out. "After all, that was my cure; it did you no good."

"Oh, but it did, my dear. It gave us the assurance that this time Genevieve would be cured."

"I won't hear of it," I insisted. "Tonight is your own look-out. Last time was mine, and I shall pay for it."

Her face brightened perceptibly. "Well, if you insist, and it's all right with the professor."

"It will be all right with the professor."

"And you will come tonight?"

"I—I—why, yes. I'll be there."

Somehow I got out of that house, and made my way back to the apartment. Chick and I had a battle royal.

"They're not rich," I told him. "They're almost starving to death. The girl was out selling some of the family heirlooms, in order to pay you tonight. I told them I insisted upon paying for the other séance. And now, young man, you're going to call this thing off, right now. Understand?"

I've never seen Chick so mad. I thought for a moment he was going to strike me. Instead, he told me very plainly just what he thought of me; what we both knew my father would have thought of my behavior; what everyone in the game would think of me—and I didn't care. I only knew I must stop Chick, in some way. And right in the midst of the row, for we had lost all sense of time, the bell rang.

"There they are," he snapped. "And I'm in fine condition to pull a séance. My head is aching like nobody's business, and I'm as nervous as a cat. You'd better beat it quick."

"Chick, let me tell them you're ill and can't see them."

"Not much. I'm putting on this show tonight—and you'd better get out. I'll manage without you."

"I'm not going!" I told him firmly.

"All right, then stay. But I warn you, one move to crab the act and you'll wish to heaven you hadn't."

He flung out of the room, and next moment he ushered the two women in.

I don't know why I stayed. I hadn't any idea what I was going to do. I only knew that, somehow, I was going to keep Chick from taking their money, if nothing else.

We all went immediately into the séance room, and Chick started the table-tipping. My nerves were on edge, and the whole thing seemed terribly artificial. Chick wasn't doing his stuff well at all. I hoped the women would sense that the whole thing was a fake, and leave; but they didn't. I was fast becoming hysterical under the strain of the situation, when I began to notice something strange about Chick. He had stopped talking, and was no longer making any attempt to tip the table. He just sat there, sort of huddled up. Then suddenly he began to snore in the strangest way. I thought, at first, it was some new stunt he was going to pull. Then the snoring stopped and he remained motionless.

"Chick!" I cried, in sudden panic. "Oh, something terrible has happened!" I jumped up, pushing the table away, and shook him, but he was perfectly limp.

"Please, Miss Johnson," said a soft voice at my elbow. "Don't interfere. He's all right. He's evidently gone into another of his trances." It was Genevieve De Witt.

"Yes, but you don't understand," I sobbed.

"It's all right, dear," whispered Mrs. Tompkins. "It's just the way he did last time."

Between them, they made me sit down, trembling, hysterical, scared nearly to death. Then the most horrible thing happened. Slowly, like waves of smoke, a white haze began to roll from Chick's body—a haze that gradually took form, until it became a beautiful woman, misty, but real.

"Mother!" gasped Genevieve De Witt.

"Hesther!" sobbed the grandmother.

The apparition remained motionless, its sweet face alight.

"Mother! You've come to help me—to let me sing again!"

Suddenly the voice of Genevieve De Witt was no longer husky and low, but clear and resonant. "Mother, I can sing—I *can*—listen—"

And for a brief time the room resounded to the music of one of the most beautiful singing voices it has ever been my privilege to hear. Then, as if satisfied, the form of Hesther De Witt began to fade, to become once more a smoky mist that slowly drifted back, back, into the prostrate body of Chick O'Brien. And at the same instant I fainted away.

They brought me to, very quickly, but with Chick it was different. The three of us worked over him for what seemed like an eternity, but without success. Then, when we had about given up hope and were deciding to call in a physician, he groaned feebly, and opened his eyes. For the next few moments, he was like a person coming out of a deep sleep, still too exhausted to move or speak. Once he was himself again, I lost no time in getting rid of the two women.

"I'll take care of him," I told them as they left. "I'll get in touch with the friend who brought me to him. He'll know what to do."

"And will you see that he gets this?" Mrs. Tompkins slipped a hard little roll of bills into my hand. "The dear man. It seems so little, really, for such a wonderful cure."

I took the bills, and kissed them both good-bye.

The rest of the story is quickly told. Chick was weak as a kitten for several days, and during that time he had time to think things over. I told him exactly what had happened—that he had called up a spirit, a body of ectoplasm from the Beyond—and I think it scared him to death.

"Ectoplasm! *Me*, an ectoplasmic medium! Good Lord!" he groaned. And a little later:

"We're getting out of this game, kid, once and for all," he said. "When things get to this point it's time to quit. We've made a nice little pile. Let's split, and call it quits."

I thought that over. I hadn't realized how much Chick meant to me, until the night of the séance when I thought his life was in danger. That experience taught me a lot!

"Chick—do you—that is, would you still want me to marry you?" I stammered.

"Would I!"

"After the way I tried to quit on you?"

"Say—I've been thinking that over, too," he told me, "and it took spunk, kid, to fight for what you believed was right, like you did. Sure I want to marry you."

"Well—let's. And buy ourselves a little business, somewhere, and cut out the graft. What do you say?"

Actions said more than words, right then. The "little business" is one of the sweetest little motion picture emporiums you ever saw. Chick and I manage it ourselves, and are happier than either one of us ever dreamed of being.

Oh, yes! Chick sent that money back to Mrs. Tompkins. Not that she will have need of it much longer—Genevieve De Witt has gone right on from where she left off—but he said he knew I'd be happier without it, and I am.