

THE MAN WHO THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD

By GRANVILLE S. HOSS

AS A MAN thinketh and so forth and so on," exclaimed Ed Wilson irritably, "such rot! How do you get that way, anyhow?"

"Now, Wilson," I remonstrated, "you condemn without a proper knowledge of your subject matter. I will undertake—"

"Oh, hush, Jackson, I know your head is filled with hobgoblins, ghosts and bogies and heaven alone knows what else. I suppose you will be telling me next that if I think often enough and hard enough that I am a blue monkey, then a blue monkey I will be."

"Tut, man," I returned laughingly, "you always take the extreme view of anything which does not happen to fit in with your preconceived ideas, but I can almost answer you in the affirmative, ridiculous as your query is. You remember Plato Goodsmith, I suppose?"

"That solemn old owl with his silly airs and enormous flowing tie a la Byron? Don't say you are going to prove your contention by him."

"But I do say that very thing. Poor Goodsmith is gone now and I will venture to say you knew nothing whatever of the manner of his taking. Very few did. Only his sister, the attending physicians and myself. It can do no harm though to make it public now as it all happened several years ago and Plato's sister has since joined him in "that beautiful land on a far away strand," leaving no connections behind who might be offended at the telling."

"All right, Jackson, shoot! I have another hour I can waste with you."

The above conversation took place one Thanksgiving night in the grill room of the club where Wilson and I had dined together. The weather was extremely cold for the time of year. The wind blew a gale, whirling and falling snow through the icy air, rattling the club house windows as though daring those inside to come out and do battle. Inside all was snug and warm; a great pile of logs blazed in the open fireplace, while overhead sparkled numerous electric lights. The waiter had cleared the table and when I tell you that on finally retiring, he left a tall black bottle and two

glasses, together with a siphon of seltzer, you will know that the time was before Mr. Volstead and his crew made themselves famous; or infamous, as you please.

"Well, Wilson," I resumed, "let me say to you first that what I am about to relate will sound wilder than anything you ever dreamed or imagined. I shall undoubtedly be disbelieved and you will probably suspect my sanity, but I tell you now that every word of it will be true. Dr. Hobson and Dr. James, to whom you may go for confirmation of my tale, will vouch for every word of it.

I knew Plato Goodsmith all my life. We made mud pies together, were schoolmates and college chums, afterward maintaining our close relations, though of course, we were not so much to each other as during the earlier years. Goodsmith was a student and a dreamer, very much in earnest about even the most trivial matters, seldom ever smiling and utterly without a sense of humor; impervious to ridicule and solemnly dignified upon all occasions. In appearance he was tall and thin with a dark cast of countenance, black hair and bushy brows shading almost expressionless gray eyes. A long narrow face, deeply lined with thought, bearing a never changing expression of melancholy speculation. In dress, too, he was eccentric, always appearing in a soft gray hat, very low collar with an enormous flowing tie, prince Albert coat, pin stripe trousers and patent leather shoes.

My newspaper employment kept me very busy and for a time I had been out of touch with Goodsmith. I lived in a downtown boarding house, while he with his maiden sister, Miss Arabella, resided in a west end bungalow. They had a small income, barely sufficient to meet their actual needs and as Plato had a horror of the business world and its rough and tumble struggle for dollars, he was never able to add anything to their small modicum.

ONE day in the early spring, my work for the day finished, I started out in search of another room, the one I had being unsatisfactory for a variety

of reasons. I had not proceeded far when I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned to find Goodsmith gazing solemnly down upon me, his mouth slightly twitching, which was about the nearest he ever came to a smile, "Ah-er-hem, Jackson," he said, "I saw you as I was crossing the street and hastened to overtake you. It has been quite some little time since we last met."

"Well, well!" I replied, "if it isn't old Plato! I certainly am glad to see you. How has the world been treating you? And Miss Arabella? She is the same as ever I hope?"

"Ah, yes, yes, we are much as usual Jackson, but ah-er-hem, I feel highly gratified by this meeting. Yes, I may say that, highly gratified."

"You have nothing on me, old boy, for I am right down happy to see you. I was just commencing a disagreeable task, looking for another boarding house, in fact, but that can be put off to some other time. Let us get in some place where we can talk. I want you to tell me all about yourself."

"Ah, no, Jackson, no, I am engaged you know on er-ah-a little literary work. Er-yes, I may call it that and I have set aside certain hours which I devote to that alone. Now er-ah-hem, you see, or ah, I should say you know Arabella and I occupy the entire house where we are at present and er-ah, there happens to be a spare room, er, yes yes, several spare rooms I might say, and hem-er, if you think you could put up with us, why er, surely you know you would be quite welcome and er-ah, company you know, yes yes. I should enjoy the arrangement immensely."

"Do you mean it, Goodsmith?" I asked. "But yes, I can see you do. Nothing could please me better; it will be like home."

"Hem, then we shall consider that settled. No no, not a word about terms. Whatever you and Arabella decide on will be very satisfactory to me. Ah-hem, we must hurry," he exclaimed, consulting a jeweler's clock across the way. "Yes yes, we must hasten or I shall not be able to resume my writing at the stipulated hour."

WE hurried along, soon reaching his place, an unpretentious little dwelling sitting far back in a spacious yard and surrounded by fruit trees. As we entered the front door Miss Arabella met us in the hall, a look of surprise on her face at the sight of her brother arriving with a guest. "Why, Plato," she commenced, "you should have—"

"Now, Arabella," he broke in, "ah-er-hem, you surely remember Henry Jackson. He has er-ah, that is, I have prevailed upon him to take a room with us. Hem, I quite urged it upon him, yes yes. Now I must leave you as it is past my hour for commencing work." Saying which he darted rapidly from us, disappearing through a door at the end of the hall.

"Why, of course, I remember Mr. Jackson, Plato's oldest friend," exclaimed Miss Arabella, "put your hat and coat on the rack and come right in. You know my brother so you must not mind him." She led the way to the library where a cheerful fire blazed in the grate and we were soon deep in reminiscences of times long gone by when she was just Plato's big sister and I an applicant for cookies and sugar plums. She was the same good natured creature she had always been, though now her hair was silvered and her face lined.

We were not long in coming to an understanding about my room, as her terms were easy and I would have agreed to anything in reason. Plato occupied a room on the first floor next to what he called his study, while Miss Arabella used one of the upstairs fronts and it was arranged that I should have a back one, of which there were two. I was to have only my breakfast and Sunday meals with them, which suited me well, as my hours were often uncertain. I was treated just as one of the family and was soon as perfectly at home as though I had never had another. We spent many pleasant evenings together, Plato and I having numerous heated but friendly arguments over his queer theories.

Our lives had gone on in this even tenor for a matter of six months, when one Sunday morning Plato joined us at the breakfast table looking even more solemn and owl-like than usual; he seemed very much preoccupied, taking his chair mechanically without a word, and proceeding to tuck his napkin into his shirt front.

"Why, Plato!" exclaimed his sister, "are you still asleep? You seat yourself like one in a trance and return no answer to our greeting."

"Oh-er-ah," he commenced, rapidly batting his eyes and seemingly making an effort to collect his faculties, "yes yes, good morning Arabella, and you Jackson; er-hem, I fear my thoughts were wandering."

"I should think they were, my dear," returned his sister, "I never saw you so absent before."

"Yes," I broke in, "your mind was as far away as the north pole. I'll wager you have been evolving another of your wild theories which I shall have to argue you out of after breakfast."

"Er, no Jackson, not this time. But ah-hem, I have experienced a very unusual dream."

"Is that all?" I replied laughingly, "Come, tell us of it, that we may know the nonsense which occupies the mind of a scholar during sleep."

"Yes," he went on, paying no attention to my raillery, "very unusual and extremely vivid for a dream, if it was a dream."

"If it was a dream," said Miss Arabella sharply, "What in the name of goodness are you talking about, Plato?"

"Ah-hem, why, I saw him just as plainly as I see you and Jackson now and er-ah, his speech was very distinct, yes, quite so."

"Man, are you crazy?" I shouted. "Come Goodsmith, wake up; what is it all about anyway?"

"Yes, Plato," said his sister, "pull yourself together and tell us what has happened."

"Hem-ah, yes yes," he responded, making a visible effort to comply with this request and looking from one to the other of us. "Yes, er-ah, a figure, shall I say? Well, this figure appeared to me as I lay in bed. He was dressed like a fop of the reign of Queen Anne, but was fitted with skeleton head. He held his hat in his hand and hopped about with a mincing step as though entering a ballroom and all the time I could hear his skeleton jaws clacking, clacking. Stopping at the foot of my bed he peered at me long and earnestly, then extending his arm and pointing a long bony finger in my direction exclaimed, "Plato Goodsmith, place your earthly affairs in order for I shall return for you on Thursday morning." He spoke slowly and distinctly, then with the same mincing gait, turned in the direction of the door where he disappeared. I have been trying to convince myself that I saw nothing, that all was merely a dream, but it was all so real and his words seem to ring in my ears yet."

"Nonsense, old man," I said, rising and clapping him heartily on the

shoulder, "Think no more of it. Dreams always go by opposites. Come, look about you, the sun is shining and the birds are singing at the window. Occupy your mind with our plans for the day."

"Well, er Jackson, this dream, if dream it was, has impressed me deeply, but yes yes, I shall make an effort; you are right, let us say no more of it."

"That is sensible, brother," remarked Miss Arabella, "why, I am surprised that a man of your common sense could be upset by so silly an occurrence."

"Well well, sister, I dare say you are right but ah-hem, let us not discuss it further. Now what can you offer me for breakfast this morning? I assure you I am ravenous," he finished cheerfully.

However, he ate scarcely anything, falling repeatedly into periods of abstraction, soon leaving the table and retiring to his study. We saw nothing of him during the day except at meal times when he seemed more like himself though still evidently pondering over his dream of the night before.

Next morning he appeared apparently as usual, discussing ordinary topics and making no reference to his unpleasant experience. It was the same on Tuesday morning and thinking to rally him a little and see if he was still thinking of the matter, I said as I was leaving for work, "Well, Plato, you have seen nothing more of your midnight friend have you, the Queen Anne dude with the death's head?"

"Er, no Jackson; no, but ahem, he said Thursday morning, you know, and this is but Tuesday."

"Nonsense, man," I responded, hastening down the steps, "forget it, dreams can harm no one."

I WAS sorry to have mentioned the thing again to him as I saw it was evidently still preying on his mind and it was with a feeling of relief that on hurrying home that evening I found him seated in the library absorbed in a book. We had one of our old time arguments that night and he retired to rest seemingly his old self.

When he appeared in the breakfast room Wednesday morning though, I knew that the phantom must have visited him again during the night. He looked pale and anxious and his hand trembled so he had difficulty in raising his coffee cup to his lips.

"Plato!" exclaimed his sister, "are you ill? Shall I call Dr. Hobson?"

"No no, Arabella, I er-ah, shall be all right presently. Quite well in fact. There is nothing wrong."

"Goodsmith," I demanded, "have you been troubled with bad dreams again and have you been weak enough to let it affect you in this manner?"

"Er, yes Jackson, I saw the same figure again and he reminded me, after inquiring if I had settled my mundane affairs, that he would come again Thursday morning."

"Of all the rubbish," I shouted, "and you a grown man almost forty years old, let such a thing upset you as if you were a child. Use your reason, Goodsmith. Consider the thing logically for what it is, a mere phantom of the mind and nothing more."

"Oh, but er-hem, it was really very vivid, Jackson and the words rang in my ears just as distinctly as your own now. I er-ah, know I was fully awake this time and hem, remember this was the second visitation."

His last words were said in a rather deprecating manner as though in apology for taking the matter so seriously and I felt rather bad toward myself for having spoken in such a rough tone.

"Well, well," I said rising, "take something for your liver and get out in the open; go out in the air and think no more of the matter. So cheer up, old man."

"Ah-er, yes Jackson, I dare say your advice is sensible, yes yes, quite the thing."

"I must be going," I exclaimed with a glance at my watch, "take good care of him, Miss Arabella and call Dr. Hobson. He is a cold, practical man and can possibly make Plato look at the thing in a rational light."

I felt unusually upset that day and showed it in the quality of my work which was not up to standard at all. I hurried home early and was met at the front door by Plato, who, without allowing me a word said, "Ah Jackson, may I have your presence in the study for a moment? I want you to perform a small service for me."

I followed him as requested and on entering the room found seated there lawyer Adams and Samuel Rugg, a neighbor, both of whom rose on our appearance.

"I merely wish you and Mr. Rugg to witness my will, Jackson. Mr. Adams has it ready for your signatures."

After the usual preliminaries this request was complied with and the two strangers departed.

"Er, Jackson, not a word of this to Arabella, mind. I ah, do not wish her

to feel unnecessarily disturbed, you know."

"It goes without saying, old man, that I shall say nothing. But really now, have you let a miserable dream work on you to such an extent as this? I can not believe it."

"Oh ah, I merely wish to be prepared, Jackson, that is all. In case anything should happen tonight I have placed all my papers in order; my affairs will need no lawyer to untangle them."

"Tut, Goodsmith," I responded, "you talk like a man going to execution. Pull up and shake off such thoughts."

"Ah, Jackson," he replied mournfully, "possibly I feel like— But no more of this, let us join Arabella and remember, not a syllable of what has passed."

We found his sister seated in the library where we spent the rest of the evening talking of commonplace matters. Plato's dream was mentioned once by her, but the subject seemed to affect him disagreeably so it was dropped. I attempted to get a few words with him alone before retiring, but he bid us both good night and retreated hastily to his room. I felt considerably worried over my friend's state of mind and it was several hours before I could sleep. However, I at last dropped off and awakened next morning at the usual time. I dressed hastily and hurried to the breakfast room, my first thought being of Plato. I felt somewhat relieved to find Miss Arabella seated calmly at the table preparing to pour the coffee, so I said nothing aside from my ordinary morning salutation. We had finished our repast when she suddenly exclaimed, "I wonder what can be detaining Plato. It is long past his hour for rising. Can he be ill?"

"I will see," I responded, hastily rising and going in the direction of his room. Upon reaching the door I knocked, at the same time calling, "Plato you are late. Is anything the matter?"

There was no answer and I was just preparing to repeat my summons when Miss Arabella, who had followed closely, brushed past me and opening the door hurried inside, exclaiming, "Brother! Brother! What is the matter? Are you—Oh!"

She stopped at the bedside and stood looking distractedly at her brother. He lay on his back, his hands crossed over his breast. The face was pale, while the half parted lips retained some color of life and the eyes, wide open, seemed to gaze abstractedly at the ceiling.

WE both remained silent for some time, too stunned for action, then speaking with difficulty I exclaimed, "Oh, he surely can not be dead! Plato! Plato! Wake up, my dear friend! Come, rouse yourself!"

An answer came, low and solemn. It was the voice of Plato, but so changed. There was no movement of the lips and the sounds seemed as though issuing from a barrel or trumpet.

"I died this morning at three o'clock. The specter kept his word."

Miss Arabella, who had become very pale and trembled violently, completely lost consciousness at these ominous words and fell to the floor in a faint. I carried her to the library where I laid her on the lounge, then hastened to call Mrs. McGill from next door to care for her while I phoned Dr. Hobson. He soon arrived and I led him at once to Plato's room, rapidly explaining what had occurred from the first dream to the astounding assertion I had just listened to.

Dr. Hobson stopped at the bedside, gazing at the patient for a few seconds, then raised the right arm, fingering the wrist for pulse beats. He soon dropped it with a muttered exclamation and proceeded to make a thorough examination. He was busied in this way for possibly half an hour, then straightening up, looked to me with a wondering, puzzled expression, saying, "I can find absolutely no evidence of life, Mr. Jackson. There is no perceptible heart action and no sign of respiration. Yet the body can hardly be termed cold and the face and eyes certainly do not indicate death."

"At this moment the same hollow voice issued from the half open mouth of Goodsmith. "I died at three o'clock this morning. The specter kept his word."

"What can be the matter with him, Doctor?" I asked in an awed tone. "He certainly still lives though the spark of life seems very low."

Dr. Hobson remained silent for some time in deep thought, finally answering: "I am free to say it is the strangest case I ever saw. He seems to be in a hypnotic trance and in a state of almost suspended animation. I would like to call in Dr. James, if there is no objection; it may be necessary to resort to heroic measures you know. I want you to watch the patient closely until my return and at the first sign of recovery administer the restorative which I shall leave. I will return with Dr. James as quickly as possible." Leaving a small phial of colorless liquid, with directions for its

use, he hurried away while I remained at the post he had assigned me.

There was no change in the condition of Goodsmith during his absence. At intervals of about half an hour the same hollow voice exclaimed, "I died at three o'clock this morning. The specter kept his word." Dr. Hobson returned in the course of an hour with Dr. James, a trained nurse accompanying them. I left the room while they made their examination and talked the case over, which occupied them somewhat longer than two hours. I called my office, telling them I would not be down, then went to Miss Arabella, whom I attempted to console. This was an impossible task as she deeply loved her brother and sat in a state of dejection from which it was beyond my power to rouse her.

On emerging from the sick room the doctors came immediately to the library where we were sitting, Dr. James announcing the result of their efforts. "We have tried every means to rouse him," he said, "but without avail. He does not respond to the usual methods of awakening a hypnotic subject and apparently feels no pain as we have resorted to measures we would not think of

using, did we not think the case desperate. Heart stimulants and restoratives have been equally powerless. We can only wait and hope for the best, trusting he will emerge naturally from his trance-like state. The nurse will stay with the patient and we will return at intervals during the day. She has full instructions how to act in case there in any sign of improvement."

They were as good as their word, making several calls during the day and night but there was no change in the condition of my poor friend. By the third day we had given up hope. The voice still came hollowly with the same dreadful announcement. The lips had lost much of their color and the face had assumed an ashen hue. The flesh was drawn and the body had become stiff as in death. I remarked to Dr. James that the patient resembled one who had been dead for several days. "Yes," he returned, "I had hesitated to mention it, but it is a fact that decomposition is actually doing its work, yet we know there is still life, the soul remains and continues to announce the death of the body. It is the most astounding case of

the control of mind over matter that human eyes have ever witnessed. The subliminal mind has become possessed of an idea which it has assumed to be a fact—and behold the result! I fear that a few more hours will usher in the end."

The next two days passed as the preceding ones. The hollow voice still sounded and the body showed additional evidences of decay. The fifth night was exceeding hot and close. The nurse had removed her cot into the hall by a window where it was possible to get a little air. I rose early the following morning, meeting her at the door of her patient's room and we entered together. We stopped gasping on the threshold, overwhelmed by the putrid odor which filled the room. It was the odor of the grave. The doctors arrived at this moment and we all hastened in, forgetting in the awfulness of the situation the disagreeable air. The body had undergone further change. The lips were now ashen and drawn. The mouth had fallen open, while the face had a greenish tinge. The body lay in an advanced state of decomposition, the hollow voice came no more and Plato Goodsmith was indeed, dead."

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