

Sight Unseen

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Chapter 1

The rather extraordinary story revealed by the experiments of the Neighborhood Club have been until now a matter only of private record. But it seems to me, as an active participant in the investigations, that they should be given to the public; not so much for what they will add to the existing data on psychical research, for from that angle they were not unusual, but as yet another exploration into that still uncharted territory, the human mind.

The psycho-analysts have taught us something about the individual mind. They have their own patter, of complexes and primal instincts, of the unconscious, which is a sort of bonded warehouse from which we clandestinely withdraw our stored thoughts and impressions. They lay to this unconscious mind of ours all phenomena that cannot otherwise be labeled, and ascribe such demonstrations of power as cannot thus be explained to trickery, to black silk threads and folding rods, to slates with false sides and a medium with chalk on his finger nail.

In other words, they give us subjective mind but never objective mind. They take the mind and its reactions on itself and on the body. But what about objective mind? Does it make its only outward manifestations through speech and action? Can we ignore the effect of mind on mind, when there are present none of the ordinary media of communication? I think not.

In making the following statement concerning our part in the strange case of Arthur Wells, a certain allowance must be made for our ignorance of so-called psychic phenomena, and also for the fact that since that time, just before the war, great advances have been made in scientific methods of investigation. For instance, we did not place Miss Jeremy's chair on a scale, to measure for any loss of weight. Also the theory of rods of invisible matter emanating from the medium's body, to move bodies at a distance from her, had only been evolved;

and none of the methods for calculation of leverages and strains had been formulated, so far as I know.

To be frank, I am quite convinced that, even had we known of these so-called explanations, which in reality explain nothing, we would have ignored them as we became involved in the dramatic movement of the revelations and the personal experiences which grew out of them. I confess that following the night after the first seance any observations of mine would have been of no scientific value whatever, and I believe I can speak for the others also.

Of the medium herself I can only say that we have never questioned her integrity. The physical phenomena occurred before she went into trance, and during that time her forearms were rigid. During the deep trance, with which this unusual record deals, she spoke in her own voice, but in a querulous tone, and Sperry's examination of her pulse showed that it went from eighty normal to a hundred and twenty and very feeble.

With this preface I come to the death of Arthur Wells, our acquaintance and neighbor, and the investigation into that death by a group of six earnest people who call themselves the Neighborhood Club.

The Neighborhood Club was organized in my house. It was too small really to be called a club, but women have a way these days of conferring a titular dignity on their activities, and it is not so bad, after all. The Neighborhood Club it really was, composed of four of our neighbors, my wife, and myself.

We had drifted into the habit of dining together on Monday evenings at the different houses. There were Herbert Robinson and his sister Alice - not a young woman, but clever, alert, and very alive; Sperry, the well-known heart specialist, a bachelor still in spite of much feminine activity; and there was old Mrs. Dane, hopelessly crippled as to the knees with rheumatism, but one of those glowing

and kindly souls that have a way of being a neighborhood nucleus. It was around her that we first gathered, with an idea of forming for her certain contact points with the active life from which she was otherwise cut off. But she gave us, I am sure, more than we brought her, and, as will be seen later, her shrewdness was an important element in solving our mystery.

In addition to these four there were my wife and myself.

It had been our policy to take up different subjects for these neighborhood dinners. Sperry was a reformer in his way, and on his nights we generally took up civic questions. He was particularly interested in the responsibility of the state to the sick poor. My wife and I had "political" evenings. Not really politics, except in their relation to life. I am a lawyer by profession, and dabble a bit in city government. The Robinsons had literature.

Don't misunderstand me. We had no papers, no set programs. On the Robinson evenings we discussed editorials and current periodicals, as well as the new books and plays. We were frequently acrimonious, I fear, but our small wrangles ended with the evening. Robinson was the literary editor of a paper, and his sister read for a large publishing house.

Mrs. Dane was a free-lance. "Give me that privilege," she begged. "At least, until you find my evenings dull. It gives me, during all the week before you come, a sort of thrilling feeling that the world is mine to choose from." The result was never dull. She led us all the way from moving-pictures to modern dress. She led us even further, as you will see.

On consulting my note-book I find that the first evening which directly concerns the Arthur Wells case was Monday, November the second, of last year.

It was a curious day, to begin with. There come days, now and then, that bring with them a strange sort of mental excitement. I have never analyzed them. With me on this occasion it took the form of nervous irritability, and something of

apprehension. My wife, I remember, complained of headache, and one of the stenographers had a fainting attack.

I have often wondered for how much of what happened to Arthur Wells the day was responsible. There are days when the world is a place for love and play and laughter. And then there are sinister days, when the earth is a hideous place, when even the thought of immortality is unbearable, and life itself a burden; when all that is riotous and unlawful comes forth and bares itself to the light.

This was such a day.

I am fond of my friends, but I found no pleasure in the thought of meeting them that evening. I remembered the odious squeak in the wheels of Mrs. Dane's chair. I resented the way Sperry would clear his throat. I read in the morning paper Herbert Robinson's review of a book I had liked, and disagreed with him. Disagreed violently. I wanted to call him on the telephone and tell him that he was a fool. I felt old, although I am only fifty-three, old and bitter, and tired.

With the fall of twilight, things changed somewhat. I was more passive. Wretchedness encompassed me, but I was not wretched. There was violence in the air, but I was not violent. And with a bath and my dinner clothes I put away the horrors of the day.

My wife was better, but the cook had given notice.

"There has been quarreling among the servants all day," my wife said. "I wish I could go and live on a desert island."

We have no children, and my wife, for lack of other interests, finds her housekeeping an engrossing and serious matter. She is in the habit of bringing her domestic difficulties to me when I reach home in the evenings, a habit which sometimes renders me unjustly indignant. Most unjustly, for she has borne with me for thirty years and is known throughout the entire neighborhood as a perfect

housekeeper. I can close my eyes and find any desired article in my bedroom at any time.

We passed the Wellses' house on our way to Mrs. Dane's that night, and my wife commented on the dark condition of the lower floor.

"Even if they are going out," she said, "it would add to the appearance of the street to leave a light or two burning. But some people have no public feeling."

I made no comment, I believe. The Wellses were a young couple, with children, and had been known to observe that they considered the neighborhood "stodgy." And we had retaliated, I regret to say, in kind, but not with any real unkindness, by regarding them as interlopers. They drove too many cars, and drove them too fast; they kept a governess and didn't see enough of their children; and their English butler made our neat maids look commonplace.

There is generally, in every old neighborhood, some one house on which is fixed, so to speak, the community gaze, and in our case it was on the Arthur Wellses'. It was a curious, not unfriendly staring, much I daresay like that of the old robin who sees two young wild canaries building near her.

We passed the house, and went on to Mrs. Dane's.

She had given us no inkling of what we were to have that night, and my wife conjectured a conjurer! She gave me rather a triumphant smile when we were received in the library and the doors into the drawing-room were seen to be tightly closed.

We were early, as my wife is a punctual person, and soon after our arrival Sperry came. Mrs. Dane was in her chair as usual, with her companion in attendance, and when she heard Sperry's voice outside she excused herself and was wheeled out to him, and together we heard them go into the drawing-room. When the Robinsons arrived she and Sperry reappeared, and we waited for her

customary announcement of the evening's program. When none came, even during the meal, I confess that my curiosity was almost painful.

I think, looking back, that it was Sperry who turned the talk to the supernatural, and that, to the accompaniment of considerable gibing by the men, he told a ghost story that set the women to looking back over their shoulders into the dark corners beyond the zone of candle-light. All of us, I remember, except Sperry and Mrs. Dane, were skeptical as to the supernatural, and Herbert Robinson believed that while there were so-called sensitives who actually went into trance, the controls which took possession of them were buried personalities of their own, released during trance from the sub-conscious mind.

"If not," he said truculently, "if they are really spirits, why can't they tell us what is going on, not in some vague place where they are always happy, but here and now, in the next house? I don't ask for prophecy, but for some evidence of their knowledge. Are the Germans getting ready to fight England? Is Horace here the gay dog some of us suspect?"

As I am the Horace in question, I must explain that Herbert was merely being facetious. My life is a most orderly and decorous one. But my wife, unfortunately, lacks a sense of humor, and I felt that the remark might have been more fortunate.

"Physical phenomena!" scoffed the cynic. "I've seen it all - objects moving without visible hands, unexplained currents of cold air, voice through a trumpet - I know the whole rotten mess, and I've got a book which tells how to do all the tricks. I'll bring it along some night."

Mrs. Dane smiled, and the discussion was dropped for a time. It was during the coffee and cigars that Mrs. Dane made her announcement. As Alice Robinson takes an after-dinner cigarette, a custom my wife greatly deploras, the ladies had remained with us at the table.

"As a matter of fact, Herbert," she said, "we intend to put your skepticism to the test tonight. Doctor Sperry has found a medium for us, a non-professional and a patient of his, and she has kindly consented to give us a sitting."

Herbert wheeled and looked at Sperry.

"Hold up your right hand and state by your honor as a member in good standing that you have not primed her, Sperry."

Sperry held up his hand.

"Absolutely not," he said, gravely. "She is coming in my car. She doesn't know to what house or whose. She knows none of you. She is a stranger to the city, and she will not even recognize the neighborhood."

Chapter 2

The butler wheeled out Mrs. Dane's chair, as her companion did not dine with her on club nights, and led us to the drawing-room doors. There Sperry threw them open, and we saw that the room had been completely metamorphosed.

Mrs. Dane's drawing-room is generally rather painful. Kindly soul that she is, she has considered it necessary to preserve and exhibit there the many gifts of a long lifetime. Photographs long outgrown, onyx tables, a clutter of odd chairs and groups of discordant bric-a-brac usually make the progress of her chair through it a precarious and perilous matter. We paused in the doorway, startled.

The room had been dismantled. It opened before us, walls and chimney-piece bare, rugs gone from the floor, even curtains taken from the windows. To emphasize the change, in the center stood a common pine table, surrounded by seven plain chairs. All the lights were out save one, a corner bracket, which was screened with a red-paper shade.

She watched our faces with keen satisfaction. "Such a time I had doing it!" she said. "The servants, of course, think I have gone mad. All except Clara. I told her. She's a sensible girl."

Herbert chuckled.

"Very neat," he said, "although a chair or two for the spooks would have been no more than hospitable. All right Now bring on your ghosts."

My wife, however, looked slightly displeased. "As a church-woman," she said, "I really feel that it is positively impious to bring back the souls of the departed, before they are called from on High."

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