

IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A DEMON

MADGE FINISTERRE awoke early on the morning after that discussion with herself anent Hammond's possible proposal.

With startling suddenness, as she lay still a moment, a vision of the pastor of Balhang came up before her mind. Then a strange thing happened to her, for a yearning sense of home-sickness suddenly filled her.

She tried to laugh at herself for her "childishness, as she called it, and sprang from her bed to prepare for her bath. Standing for one instant by the bedside, she murmured:

"But, after all, it is time I was paddling across again. Who ever heard of anyone from our side staying here through the winter? I must think this all out seriously. Anyway, I'll get my bath, and dress, and go for a stroll before breakfast. They say that one ought to see suburban London pouring over the bridges into London city in the early morning. I'll go this morning."

Half-an-hour later she was dressed ready for her expedition. As she passed the office on her way out, they were sorting the morning mail. She waited for her letters. There was only one, but it was from home.

Racing back to her room, she tore it open with an eagerness born, unconsciously to herself, of the nostalgia that had seized upon her three-quarters of an hour before.

There were two large, closely-written sheets in the letter - one from her father and one from her mother. Each told their own news.

She read her father's first; every item interested her, though as she read she seemed to feel that there was all through it an underlying strain of longing for her return.

"Dear old poppa!" she murmured as she neared the finish of the epistle.

Suddenly her eyes took in the two lines of postscript jammed close into the bottom edge of the first sheet. Her heart seemed to stand still as she read:-

"Pastor is considered sick. Doctor can't make his case out."

"Pastor sick!" She gasped the words aloud; then, turning swiftly to her mother's letter, she cried: "Momma will tell more than this!"

Her eyes raced over the written lines. Her mother said a little more than her father had done about the sickness of their friend and pastor; not much, though, in actual words, but to the disturbed heart of the young girl there seemed to her much deeper meaning.

An excited trembling came upon her for a few moments. The next instant she had put a strong curb upon herself, and, folding the letters, and replacing them in the envelope, she cried out quietly, but sharply:

"The boat from Southampton sails at two to-day. I'll catch that!"

The next instant she was divesting herself of her hat and jacket, and began to set about her packing.

Now and again she talked to herself thus: "Sick, is he? Poor old pastor! I guess I know what's the matter with him, and I'll put him right in five minutes."

She smiled as she went on: "I guess, too, I've found out what's the matter with me - I want to be a pastor's wife!"

The next instant her voice was caroling out:

"For I tell them they need not come wooing of me,
For my heart, my heart, is over the sea."

Her fingers were busy, her mind all the time kept mentally arranging a host of things.

"I wonder," she murmured presently, "how Uncle Archibald and George will take my sudden departure? Well, I'm glad George is out of town. He's been showing signs of spoons lately with me, so it's best, perhaps, that I should get off without seeing him."

By eleven that forenoon she had left Waterloo. Her uncle had seen her off from the station. He wanted to accompany her to Southampton, but she would not hear of it.

"I want to be very quiet all the way down," she said, "and write some important letters. Make my excuses to everybody, and explain that I only had an hour or two to do everything."

At the last moment her uncle slipped an envelope into her hand, saying, "You are not to open it until you have been travelling a quarter of an hour."

Then came the good-byes, and - off.

She had been travelling nearly a quarter of an hour when she opened the envelope. There was a brief, hearty, loving note inside, in her uncle's hand-writing, expressing the joy her visit had given him, and his sense of loneliness at her going, and saying:

"Please, dear Madge, accept the enclosure in second envelope, as a souvenir of your visit, from your affectionate

"NUNKUMS."

She opened the smaller envelope. To her breathless amazement, she found a Bank of England note for £1,000. When she recovered herself a little, a smile filled her eyes as she murmured: "Fancy an American Methodist pastor's wife with a thousand pounds of her own; My!"

The train was rushing on; she remembered that she had a special letter to write. She opened her bag and took out writing materials. The carriage rocked tremendously, but she managed to pen her letter. Before she finally enclosed the letter in an envelope, she took from her purse a two-inch cutting from the columns of some newspaper or magazine. This she placed in the letter.

Tom Hammond had just settled himself down to work when a letter, bearing the Southampton post-mark, was delivered to him. Opening it, and reading "My dear Mr. Hammond," he turned next to the signature. "Madge Finisterre?" he cried softly, surprisedly, under his breath. Wonderingly he turned back to the first page, and read:

"You will be surprised to know that when you receive this I shall be steaming down Channel en route for New York. I got letters from home this morning that made it imperative that I should start at once.

"I cannot leave without thanking you for all your kindness to me. It has been a pleasure to have known you, and I sincerely hope that we may meet again someday.

"Now I am going to take you right into my confidence, Mr. Hammond, for who so discreet as a 'prophet?' - vide *The Courier*."

"Yesterday evening, after dinner, I had a long talk alone with myself. I had had a very pleasant *tete-a-tete* tea with a friend - perhaps you may remember this, - and while I went over in mind many things in connection with that *tete-a-tete*, especially the events immediately preceding the interruption, I suddenly realized a sense of longing for home.

"A night or two before I sailed from America, our pastor asked me to be his wife. He was awfully in earnest, poor fellow; and I could see how love for me - gay, frivolous little me - was consuming him. I was startled at the proposition, and told him frankly that I did not know my own mind, but that if ever I found out that I loved him, I would come right away - and tell him so. I found out this morning, when I heard that he was dangerously sick, that I wanted him as much as ever he wanted me. At this stage of the letter, please read the cutting enclosed."

Wondering what the clipping could have to do with the subject, Tom Hammond laid down the letter and read the cutting:

"A king had a son born to him in his old age, and was warned by his astrologers and physicians, that his son would be blind if he ever saw the light before he was twelve years old. Accordingly the king built for him a subterranean chamber, where he was kept till he was past the fatal age.

Thereupon he was taken out from his retreat, and shown all the beauties of the world, gold and jewels and arms, and carriages and horses, and beautiful dresses. But seeing some women pass, he asked what they might be, and was told, 'Demons, who lead men astray.' Afterwards the king asked him which of all the beautiful things he had seen he desired most, and the prince answered, "The demons which lead men astray."

"I am going back to be demon to my pastor," the letter went on, "to lead him - not astray, I trust, but back to health. Please keep all this in absolute confidence, for I have not given even a hint of it to my uncle. Whenever you visit the States, be sure to come and visit me, for no one will be more welcome from the Old Country than yourself.

"By-the-bye, dear friend, apropos of your remark anent the presence of a woman to make tea for you, keep the subject well before yourself, and when you see the lady who can really satisfy all your ideals, propose quickly, secure her, and - happy thought - do America by way of a honeymoon, and come and see me.

"Yours most sincerely,
"Madge Finisterre."

He smiled as he laid down the letter. For a moment all the bright, piquant personality of the writer filled his vision. Then, with a swiftness and completeness that was almost startling, her face vanished from his mental picturing, and Zillah Robart, in all her radiant loveliness, took the place in his thought and vision.

For a brief while he was absorbed in his new vision.

The sudden entrance of Ralph Bastin dispelled his dreaming.

After a few moments' talk, Bastin cried, quite excitedly, "I say, Tom, those pars of yours about the Jews are the talk of all London - our London, I mean, of course."

Without breaking the confidence reposed in him by Cohen, Tom Hammond told his friend what he had recently discovered as to the Jewish work on the materials for the New Temple.

"That's strange, Tom," returned Bastin. "I dropped in now as much as anything to tell you that last night I met Dolly Anstruther - you remember her, don't you? - the little Yorkshire girl that was learning sculpture when we were staying at Paris with Montmartre.

"She has just come back from Italy, where she has been three years. She told me how startled she was to hear from several sources about this New Temple business. She said she visited a very large studio in Milan, and saw the most magnificent pillar she had ever seen. She asked the great artist what it was for, and he said, 'It is a pillar for the New Temple at Jerusalem.'

"In Rome she visited another great studio, and there she saw a duplicate of the Milan pillar, and was told again, 'Oh, that is a pillar for the future Temple at Jerusalem.'

"In another place, where the most wonderful brass work in the world is turned out, she saw two magnificent gates; and, on inquiring where they were destined to be hung, received the same reply, 'In the future Temple at Jerusalem.' What does it all mean, Tom?" he added.

"That is what I want to find out, to be perfectly sure of, Ralph. My intelligent Jew, of whom I told you, declares that the Messiah is coming. We, as Christians - nominal Christians, I mean, of course, - same as you and I, Ralph, don't profess anything more -"

Bastin searched his friend's face with a sudden keenness, but did not interrupt him by asking him what he meant.

"As nominal Christians," Tom Hammond went on, "we believe the CHRIST has already come. But the question has been aroused in my mind of late (suggested by certain things that I have not time to go into now), does the Bible teach that CHRIST is coming again, and are all these strange movings among the Jews and in the politics of the world so many signs and -"

There came an interruption at that moment. The tape was telling of the assassination of a Continental crowned head. Both men became journalists, pure and simple, in an instant.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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