

SIGHT UNSEEN

by MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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SECOND INSTALMENT

Synopsis

Six people, Horace Johnson (who tells this story), his wife, old Mrs. Dane, Herbert Robinson and his sister, Alice, Dr. Sperry, friends and neighbors, are in the habit of holding weekly meetings. At one of them Mrs. Dane, who is hostess, varies the program by unexpectedly arranging a spiritualistic seance with Miss Jeremy, a friend of Dr. Sperry and not a professional, as the medium.

Now go on with the story

Miss Jeremy, the medium, was due at 8.30 and at 8.20 my wife assisted Mrs. Dane into one of the straight chairs at the table, and Sperry, sent out by her, returned with a darkish bundle in his arms, and carrying a light bamboo rod.

"Don't ask me what they are for," he said to Herbert's grin of amusement. "Every workman has his tools."

Herbert examined the rod, but it was what it appeared to be and nothing else.

Some one had started the phonograph in the library, and it was playing gloomily, "Shall we meet beyond the river?" when Miss Jeremy came in.

She was not at all what we had expected. Twenty-six. I should say, and in black dinner dress. She seemed like a perfectly normal young woman, even attractive in a fragile, delicate way. Not much personality, perhaps, the very word "medium" precludes that. A "sensitive," I think she called herself. We were presented to her, and but for the stripped and bare room, it might have been any evening, after any dinner, with bridge waiting.

We all liked her, and Sperry, Sperry the bachelor, the antifeminist, was staring at her with curiously intent eyes.

Miss Jeremy gave the room only the most casual glances.

"Where shall I sit?" she asked.

Mrs. Dane indicated her place, and she asked for a small stand to be brought in and placed about two feet behind her chair, and then to take the black cloth from the table and hang it over the bamboo rod, which was laid across the backs of the chairs. Thus arranged the curtain formed a low screen behind her, with the stand beyond it. On this stand, we placed, at her order, various articles from our pockets—I a fountain pen, Sperry a knife; and my wife contributed a gold bracelet.

We all felt, I fancy, rather absurd.

We arranged between us that we were to sit on each side of her, and Sperry warned me not to let go of her hand for a moment. "They have a way of switching hands," he explained in a whisper. "If she wants to scratch her nose, I'll scratch it."

We were, we discovered, not to touch the table, but to sit around it at a distance of a few inches, holding hands and thus forming the circle. And for twenty minutes we sat thus, and nothing happened. She was fully conscious and even spoke once or twice, and at last she moved impatiently and told us to put our hands on the table.

I had put my opened watch on the table before me, a night watch with a luminous dial. At five minutes after nine I felt the top of the table waver under my fingers, a curious, fluid-like motion.

"The table is going to move," I said.

However, curiously enough, the table did not move. Instead my watch, before my eyes, slid to the edge of the table and dropped to the floor, and almost instantly an object, which we recognized as Sperry's knife, was flung over the curtain and struck the wall behind Mrs. Dane violently.

One of the women screamed, ending in an hysterical giggle. Then we heard rhythmic beating on the top of the stand behind the medium. Startling as it was at the beginning, increasing as it did from a slow beat to an incredibly rapid drumming, when the initial shock was over Herbert commenced to gibe.

"Your fountain pen, Horace," he said to me. "Making out a statement for services rendered

by its eagerness." The answer to that was the pen itself, aimed at him with apparent accuracy, and followed by an outcry from him.

"Here, stop it!" he said. "I've got ink all over me!" We laughed consumedly. The sitting had taken all the attributes of practical joking. The table no longer quivered under my hands.

"Please be sure you are holding my hands tight. Hold them very tight," said Miss Jeremy, her voice sounded faint and far away. Her head was dropped forward on her chest, and she suddenly sagged in her chair. Sperry broke the circle, and coming to her took her pulse. It was, he reported, very rapid.

"You can move and talk now if you like," he said. "She's in a trance, and there will be no more physical demonstrations."

Mrs. Dane was the first to speak. "I was looking for my fountain pen and Herbert was again examining the stand."

"I believe it now," Mrs. Dane said. "I saw your watch go, Horace, but tomorrow I won't believe it at all."

"How about your companion?" I asked. "Can she take shorthand? We ought to have a record."

"Probably not in the dark."

"We can have some light now," Sperry said.

There was a sort of restrained movement in the room now. Herbert turned on a bracket light, and I moved away the roller chair.

"Go and get Clara, Horace," Mrs. Dane said to me, "and have her bring a note book and pencil." Nothing, I believe, happened during my absence. Miss Jeremy was sunk in her chair and breathing heavily when I came back with Clara, and Sperry was still watching her pulse. Suddenly my wife said:

"Why look! She's wearing my bracelet!"

This proved to be the case, and

if you can. "Sure I can, and it will make your hair curl. Then suddenly there was sort of a dramatic pause and then an outburst.

"He's dead."

"Who is dead?" Sperry asked, with his voice drawn a trifle thin. "A bullet just above the ear. That's a bad place. I thank goodness there's not much blood. Cold water will take it out of the carpet. Not hot. Not hot. Do you want to set the stain?"

"Look here," Sperry said, looking around the table. "I don't like this. It's darned grisly."

"Oh, fudge!" Herbert put in irreverently. "Let her rave, or it, or whatever it is. Do you mean that a man is dead?"—to the medium. "Yes. She has the revolver. She needn't cry so. He was cruel to her. He was a beast. Sullen."

"Can you see the woman?" I asked.

"It it's sent out to be cleaned it will cause trouble. Hang it in the closet."

Herbert muttered something about the movies having nothing on us, and was angrily hushed.

"Now then," Sperry said in a businesslike voice, "you see a dead man, and a young woman with him. Can you describe the room?"

"A small room, his dressing room. He was shaving. There is still lather on his face."

"And the woman killed him?"

"I don't know. Oh, I don't know. No, she didn't. He did it."

"He did it himself?"

There was no answer to that, but a sort of sulky silence.

"Are you getting this, Clara?"

Mrs. Dane asked sharply. "Don't miss a word. Who knows what this may develop into?"

I looked at the secretary, and it was clear that she was terrified. I got up and took my chair to her. Coming back I picked up my forgotten watch from the floor. It was still going and the hands marked nine-thirty.

"Now," Sperry said in a soothing

tone, "you said there was a shot fired and a man was killed? What house?"

"Two shops. One is in the ceiling of the dressing room." "And the other killed him?" But here instead of a reply we got the words "library paste."

Quite without warning the medium groaned, and Sperry believed the trance was over.

"She's coming out," he said. "A glass of wine, somebody."

But she did not come out. Instead, she twisted in the chair.

"He's so heavy to lift," she muttered. Then: "Get the lather off his face. The lather. The lather."

She subsided into the chair and began to breathe with difficulty.

"I want to go out. I want air. If I could only go to sleep and forget it. The drawing-room furniture is scattered over the house."

"Can you tell us about the house?" somebody asked.

There was a distinct pause. Then: "Certainly. A brick house. The servants' entrance is locked, but the key is on a nail, among the vines. All the drawing-room furniture is scattered through the house."

"She must mean the furniture of this room," Mrs. Dane whispered.

The remainder of the sitting room was chaotic. The secretary's notes consist of unrelated words often being childish.

On going over the written notes next day, when the stenographic record had been copied

"Library paste!" he said. "It rolls into a soft malleable ball. It could quite easily be used to fill a small hole in plaster. The paper would paste down over it too."

"Then you think—?"

"I'm not thinkink at all. The thing she described may have taken place in Timbuctoo. May have happend ten years ago. May be the plot of some book she has read."

"On the other hand," I replied, "it is just possible that it was here in this neighborhood, while we were sitting in that room."

"Have you any idea of the time?"

"I know exactly. It was half-past nine."

At midnight, shortly after we reached home, Sperry called me on the phone. "Be careful Horace," he said, "don't let Mrs. Horace think anything has happened. Arthur Wells killed himself tonight, shot himself in the head. I want you to go there with me."

"Arthur Wells!"

"Yes. I say Horace, did you happen to notice the time the seance began tonight?"

"It was five minutes after nine when my watch fell."

"Then it would have been about half-past when the trance began?"

(Continued Next Week.)

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Sperry threw open the drawing-room doors.

was I regret to say, the cause of a most unjust suspicion on my wife's part.

Take down everything that happens, Clara, and all we say," Mrs. Dane said in a low tone. "Even if it sounds like nonsense put it down."

It is because Clara took her orders literally that I am making this more readable version of her script.

For some five minutes, perhaps, Miss Jeremy breathed stertorously, and it was during this interval that we introduced Clara and took up our positions. Sperry sat near the medium now, where Herbert had been.

The rest of the party were as we had been, save that we no longer touched hands. Suddenly Miss Jeremy began to breathe more quietly, and to move about in her chair. Then she sat upright.

"Good evening, friends," she said. "I am glad to see you all again."

I caught Herbert's eye and he grinned. "Good evening, little Bright Eyes," he said. "How's everything in the happy hunting ground tonight?"

"Dark and cold," she said, "dark and cold and the knee hurts. It's very bad. If the key is on the nail—arnica will take the pain out."

Herbert, who was still flip-

pantly amused, said:

"Don't bother about your knee. Give us some local stuff. Gossip,

ing tone, "you said there was a shot fired and a man was killed? What house?"

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